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MY UNCLE THE CLOCKMAKER

CHAPTER I.

TOM FLETCHER THE CARRIER IS OVERTAKEN BY A PEDESTRIAN STRANGER.

The dusk of an April evening was falling sombrely over the earth, as a heavily-laden covered cart paused at the foot of a long ascent towards a village in Derbyshire. The cart was piled up with all sorts of tubs, boxes, and packages, such as are generally seen in the cart of a village carrier who goes weekly between his own hamlet and the next market town, taking thither the eggs, butter, &c. of his neighbours, and bringing them back sundry things from the shops in return, besides lots of things for the little shopkeepers of the village—tea-chests, sugar-tubs, soap-boxes, brushes, and the like. Ay, many a time had the lads of the villages through which that old cart passed weekly, got behind it to speculate on the precious contents of those packages. The little round casks that made their mouths water, for they knew that they were full of figs; those mats, that were stitched up so provokingly close, and, no doubt, were almost bursting with oranges, or nuts, or almonds, or raisins; and those long boxes with split hazel bands on the outside, and so slightly made, that when the bands were loosened, they seemed as if they would fall to pieces. What did those long, pointed, flag-like leaves, that stuck out between the box and the

lid, tell of but Spanish juice? That old cart was a regular tantalizer every Saturday afternoon, as it went slowly homeward through half-a-dozen villages and paused, not for a very short time, occasionally before the village ale-houses, for the carrier to wash the dust out of his throat, as he said. Yet a most slovenly and dirty old vehicle it was, nevertheless—splashed and daubed up to the very awning of tarpauling with one layer of mud on another; for the roads there, in those days, were of a most terrific nature, and old Tom Fletcher the carrier thought it totally waste of time to wash his cart, though he had a week to do it in, being of the opinion of Dean Swift's servant, that it would soon want doing again. The very board on which his name was painted, as by law required, was so splashed over, that nobody was any the wiser for it; and the oil-horn, which contained the greasing for the wheels, and hung dangling at the side of one of the said wheels, was so encrusted with repeated layers of mud, that a very animated dispute might have been held as to the fact of its being a horn at all. That it was for the purpose of lubricating the cart axles, you could see by the quill end of a great stout turkey's feather sticking up out of it, and partly keeping open the lid.

The cart was drawn by a sturdy bay horse, whose shaggy heels were also loaded with the mud of the roads, and no small quantity of the same abundant article hung on his sides and in his long mane, which was of pale tawny hair, as if it had been faded by the sun. The horse, which was, moreover, what is called a bald-faced one, that is, had the greater part, and one eye, white, was as remarkable a looking beast as you could chance to see. He appeared to understand his business as well as his master; and when he came to the

foot of this ascent, he quietly stood still without his driver having to say "Wo." He had stopped on this spot, to an inch, every Saturday evening, at about the same time, for the last seven years; and, indeed, through the whole ten miles of road that he was accustomed to drag his load, summer and winter, he had his regular places to stop, or to draw on more actively, and his times for pausing, which he regulated with very little order or direction from his master. Indeed, so exact had the habits of the horse become, that when he stopped out of his regular routine, or stood still longer than his wont, Tom Fletcher the carrier would say, "What ails thee, Smiler?" and would instantly look to see if his gears were all right, or if he had got a pebble in his foot; and if he did not discover, which, however, was seldom the case, the cause of this deviation from Smiler's usual habits, would say, "Od rot thee, what ails thee? arta turning lazy, or arta getting oud like thy mester? Cup, man, that'll niver do; we canna afford to get either oud or lazy! Gee! com-mother-who!" and a crack of his whip put fresh life into the faithful old creature.

Tom Fletcher himself was as complete a character as his horse, nay, he was so much of a character, that he would not have set the value of a straw on his horse if it had not been a kind of oddity, and had had a will of its own. Tom was a sturdily-built man of nearly sixty years of age, forty of which he had plodded once a-week over this very ground to the town of Nottingham and back. His figure now stooped considerably forward, and except when he stopped to speak to any one, he went along beside his cart, with his face directed on the ground before him, as if he were in deep thought, although what his thoughts were about, it would have been difficult

to say. When he did lift up his head to speak to you, or to address his word of command or of encouragement to Smiler, you then saw a ruddy face, full of strong sense and dry humour. His large grey eyes had a quiet knowing look, from under the broad brim of his old hat, that had generally a penny-worth of whip-cord twisted under the band, in case he should lose that from his lash. He wore sturdy tall ankle boots, and old leather leggins, and over his coat a blue carter's frock, which frock, as he went along, was generally twisted up, and tucked in at the waist, so as to allow him to keep a hand in each capacious outside pocket of his coat, with his whip sticking up behind his arm. Out of these pockets his hands were seldom drawn, except to lift and crack his whip, to lift the beer-pot to his mouth at the road-side alehouse, or to pull forth and deliver a letter, for he was the postman along his whole line, or to drag out some package from his cart.

Tom was a man of much business, for, besides all the letters, newspapers, and packets that he had to receive, and with them a most bewildering host of directions how they were to be delivered in Nottingham, when he got there, from farmers and cottagers and their wives, and from young men and girls to their sweet-hearts, and how he was to bring answers back; and then all the popping out of doors and garden gates as he came back, to receive these answers, and all the scoldings he got for not finding this or that person at home, and for not bringing answers which had never been sent; besides all this, it was a manufacturing district, and he had a whole mountain of white bags of stockings to carry to Nottingham, and of cotton to bring from it, with a pocket-full of money for the work done. Tom

Fletcher was a man, we may be assured, eagerly looked for at home on a Saturday night. But spite of this, he never hurried himself. All his motions were as regular as clock-work. He started to a minute from home in the morning; at the very moment when the toll-bar men expected him to be up, and open their gates for him, for he commenced his journey at two or three o'clock in the morning, he was there; and it was a rare thing if he were not seen coming up the lane into his own village within half-an-hour of his regular time. Tom was a crabbed sort of fellow in his manner, and if any one began to question him, as to what had made him, on any occasion, a few minutes later than usual, it put him amazingly out of humour, and he would bluntly and tartly say, "You sitten a-whom here, and thinken that a hundred things can be done just as soon as one' Now, do just set off to Nottingham, and run round to a' the hosiers' warehouses, and the grocers' and drapers' shops, and carry a' th' silly bits o' love-letters a' round the town, and come back to a quarter of an hour, and I'll gie ye the cart and horse and every thing into the bargain. Do pray ye, now try it—try it, and dunna bother me."

But Tom was not yet got home to have these questions put to him. He was standing at the bottom of the hill about two miles from home. Smiler had made his usual number of snorts and blowings, as if to clear his wind and wind-pipe, and take in a stock of breath for the long pull up the hill; and Tom Fletcher had just picked up a great pebble to scotch the wheel with when Smiler should stop again in the ascent to rest; and they were about to go on, when up came a stranger and asked Tom how far it was to the next village.

"As near as I can tell," said Tom, eying the inquirer, "and I have gone it some four thousand times, it 's about two mile there and one back again."

"How can that be?" said the stranger; "I should think it must be just as far one way as the other."

"Well, try it then, try it—what 's the use of axing me, if you known better than th' barn natives? Try it, and you'll soon know. Gee-up, Smiler, lad!"

And with that on went Smiler in good earnest, like a sensible beast, knowing that a tough job was before him. The old cart went on, lumbering up the dirty lane, and its wheels jarring in the deep ruts, and Tom, with his hands in his coat-pockets, went on by its side, looking on the ground, as if he had totally dismissed the stranger from his mind. The stranger, who was a middle-sized but broad-built man, of apparently Tom's own age, went on slowly after, seeming also to think no more of the churlish carrier, than the carrier did of him, but to peer about in the twilight, as if to take cognizance of what sort of a road he was in. He now turned round, and gazed, as well as the feeble remains of light would permit, down the road, then lifted his eyes to the high hedges which stood on equally high banks on each side of the lane; and then went on again looking, or endeavouring to look, into the banks, as if he would fain discover what plants grew there.

It was, indeed, a delicious hour and scene. The hedges, composed of tall, overhanging bushes of hawthorn, crab and hazel, were already partly green with their unfolding leaves; and the banks beneath them sent forth on the twilight air every now and then the most delicious odour of violets that grew thickly upon them. The showers of April had at once left a balmy softness in the air,

that it was a luxury to breathe, and had called forth the spirit of the violet and the primrose to revive in the heart the memory of many a departed spring. It seemed to do this in the bosom of the stranger, for he went on with slower pace, pausing sometimes and uttering to himself—"charming! charming!" But, awakening again as out of his reverie, he moved faster. The carrier's cart could no longer be seen through the gloom, but could still be heard rattling on its way, and every now and then stopping, while the voice of the carrier was loudly heard with its "Wo! wo! so then, Smiler!" as he clapped the great pebble under the wheel, to keep the cart from running back.

The stranger again came up to him, and, as if not at all regardful of the man's crabbed manner, said, "Well, how is it now, my friend, that you make it out to be twice as far to the village, as it is from it to the bottom of the hill?"

"Why, what should measure distance, but time and labour?" said Tom Fletcher; "It 's all up hill there, and all down hill back again; and if it do not take you twice as long, and cost you twice as much pains to go one way as the other, why then, call me a sand-bag."

"Aha! no bad way of reckoning, after all, and rather new, too, which is something," said the stranger; "but are you the Leniscar carrier now-a-days? When I was in this country before, it was one Dick Anthony. The roads were worse then than now, which are still the worst I have seen these twenty years; and Dick went manfully through them for many a year. Is he still living?"

"Living?" exclaimed the carrier, "why, do you think folks live here for ever? I can tell you

that I have been the Leniscar carrier these forty years, and Dick Anthony has been just that time in his grave!"

"Oh, indeed! Poor Dick, how soon he must have gone off. Little did I think, when I laughed at his fright in these lanes, that he was so near his end. If you knew Dick, you knew that he was too fond of hot ale, with ginger in it, on his winter journeys, and used sometimes to be missing for whole days when he ought to have brought home the poor people's things and money. Many a time have they had to set out to seek him, and generally found him in a public-house at Kimberly drinking with the topers of the village. On one occasion he said he had had such a fright that he dared not venture forward, that he had seen the foul fiend. When asked, however, to describe him, he could give no farther account of him, than that he was 'all spotted and spangled.' The laughter of the villagers was excessive, and it became a common by-word, that a thing was 'all spotted and spangled,' like Dick Anthony's devil. Poor Dick!"

"Mester," said Tom Fletcher, who now began to appear as curious, as he had before been crusty, "yo seem to ha' a famous memory. What yo sen is a by-word here yet."

"And who are living of the old people here yet?" continued the stranger. "Is parson Gould, or squire Hunter, or Ned Jackson the barber, or Betty Garner the pinder's widow, or old Thomas Hall, or who? What is become of the Hilliards; are they still here? and Hives the miller, and those handsome sons of his?"

"Beleddy, Mester, yo 're a dab hand at axing questions, at ony rate! One has to look back a' nation long way into one's books to find what yo

axen after. Most o' th' oud folks yo talken on would be oud folks wi' a vengeance, if they were living now! Uh, fee, fi, fo, fum, why, they 've been dead and gone a' most these half-hundred years. I question if th' sexton could find their graves even, he s had such generations to put to bed with his spade since their time! But I think it 's my turn now to ax a question, and that is, and pray, who may yo be? Wer ye barn here? Wer ony o' th' oud ancients ye 've been axing after yo 're relations? or how war it? Here yo ha been of a sartinty; and I, that has spent a' my days here, should know summat about ye!"

"It's but little that you 'll remember of me, my friend. I used to come here on business when I was a youth, often. I was not from here, and none of these people, nor indeed any people in this village of Highknoll, were related to me. But with the fondness for scenes where the light-hearted days of our youth were more or less spent—I have a great liking for much of this neighbourhood, and have always determined, if I lived, one day to visit it again. Ah! beautiful, beautiful days have I spent here! But you go on farther, do you not—to Leniscar? Thither I am desirous of going. I have a wish to stay there awhile this spring. If the reality equal the sweetness of my memory perhaps I may there end my days. Is the place as still, as retired, as old-fashioned as it was? Are its old-fashioned cottages, thatched and half-timbered, still standing in their orchards and under their great walnut trees; or has the busy, meddling, maiming rage for modern improvements, like the dry-rot, got in there, eating out all the solid substance of life, and leaving only its form?"

"By the mass, but yo done know how to ax

questions. Why yo must be a lawyer. But as to th' oud houses and th' oud trees, there they are, sure enough, just as yo left 'em. Yo *were* there, didn't yo say?"

"Thank God!" said the stranger; "then there is peace in one place on the earth. Thank God! I may hope then for some tranquil days!" He sighed and was silent.

Tom Fletcher grew every moment more full of curiosity. Who could this be, that must be pretty much of his own age, who remembered everything so minutely, and yet whom he could not for the life of him call to mind.

"And pray what then may yo're name be?" asked he.

"John Fox."

"John Fox—Fox—then of a sartin yo war na barn i' Leniscar. There's no Foxes there, nor hanna been i' my time."

"I fancy not," said the stranger laconically.

"And th' oud folks there? What o' th' oud folks there did yo know?"

"I did not ask after any old folks there, my friend."

"No, nor young uns nother, I reckon," added Tom again rather crustily.

"Nor young ones—but as you have asked me mine I will take the liberty to ask you your name. It is only right that we who are travelling on to the same place, and may become neighbours, should be better acquainted."

"My name, if that'll do yo ony good, is Tom Fletcher."

"Tom Fletcher! surely not the Tom Fletcher that I knew. Tom Fletcher, the great, sturdy lad that went to herd the cattle on the common; that

had the battle with the great gipsy fellow who would drive off the miller's mare on pretence that it was one he himself had lost, and beat him by suddenly drawing a great wild-rose shoot with thorns as long and hooked as a hawk's beak across the gipsy's nose and brow, so that the smart and the gush of blood completely disabled him till Tom had time to give the alarm—that Tom Fletcher you surely cannot be!"

"Zounds, Mester, who are yo I say again?—who are yo? I *should* know yo, for yo known me. Tell me at once, for tell me yo shall and must."

"You are then that same Tom Fletcher?" said the stranger stepping before the carrier. "You are? No, you cannot be. Time cannot have played such tricks with us. What I—what you, Tom Fletcher, this weather-beaten, stooping old man? Tom, the boy, the jolly boy, the hardy, the warm-hearted Tom, who was ready to be the champion of any one who was weak or abused. Tom, who ducked the tailor in Shaw's mill-dam because he ill-used his parish' prentices? Who broke open the pinfold many a night because the pinder did not give fodder to the imprisoned cattle? Who raised a ladder to the hall window, and enabled the maid who was wrongfully accused, as everybody knew, of stealing the squire's spoons, and had only been charged with it from the wicked man's private resentment, and enabled her to escape, and marched with her all night to her own place of abode and friends? No, *this* cannot be *that* Tom Fletcher!"

"It is no other, Mester," said Tom in great astonishment; "but how the dickens yo can remember me a' those years, and I canna, for the life of me, remember yo, that beats me a' to snapdragons."

"Give me your hand, Tom," said the stranger, giving it a hearty gripe. "Rough as is the outside which time and life's storms have given you, there 's a warm heart beats in that bosom, or nature is a cheat. No, nothing could wholly change that. Never mind if you cannot remember me, there was nothing particular to remember. My memory has always been extraordinary, and besides, a Tom Fletcher one does not so soon forget. Well, here you are at Highknoll, you will have to stay sometime and deliver your articles—I shall post on. I know the way. I shall find the old sign of the Cat and Fiddle still hanging, I hope; and to-morrow at church we shall meet again. Good night."

With this the stout stranger strode forward, leaving Tom Fletcher in such a state of wonderment as he had not experienced for years.

CHAPTER II.

JOHN FOX SETTLES HIMSELF AT LENISCAR.

When Tom Fletcher was turning out of his cart the bags of cotton for the village stocking-makers, which he had then and there, on arriving at home, to deliver to the eager expectants, amongst the heavier articles which he was accustomed to leave till the Monday morning, he spied a stout, black portmanteau which he had never seen put in. It was so common a circumstance, however, for articles to be put into his cart while he was going his rounds in the town, and had left it at the inn in the care of a boy that he paid for the purpose, that this would not at all have attracted his attention in itself. But the kind of article was so very different to what he was accus-

omed to have committed to his care; was so substantial, so good, so fashionable—even Tom thought, it was, in fact, the travelling portmanteau befitting a gentleman of any rank—that he wondered no little in descrying it. "What's that?" said he to himself aloud. "What have I got here? That must be for the stranger gentleman, now, I warrant me;" and on stooping down to examine its address, sure enough it was for "Mr. John Fox, at the Cat and Fiddle, Leniscar."

All Tom's curiosity was roused; he dragged out the large black portmanteau, but with especial care not to rub or injure it against the rough tubs and boxes amongst which it was lodged. The poor people who stood round the end of the cart like a swarm of bees around the entrance to the hive, each eager to seize hold of his bag and see what quantity of work the hosier had sent him for the week, although anxiously bent on their own little but vital interests, and clamorous to have their accounts looked into, and the cash paid by the all-important Tom, having still all their purchases for the Sunday's dinner, &c., to make, yet no sooner saw this unusual object appear at the opening of the cart than they were all at once still. "What have you got there, Thomas?" asked a dozen voices of men and women at once.

"Why now, how am I likely to tell yo when I dunna know mysen?" said Tom.

"By Guy! but that belongs to some great gentleman; that's such a trunk as never war seen i' this village before. My eye! but isn't it a smart one! And what a weight!" said they, lifting it from the ground, where Tom had set it to contemplate it. "And what straps round it, and what neat work, and what a handsome plate! and, what's that? John Fox—ay, John Fox, engraved on it. And see on this

ticket hanging to the handle, 'Mr. John Fox, at the Cat and Fiddle!' Oh, the gentleman's at the Cat and Fiddle! Thomas, who is it? Who is it, Thomas?"

"Howd yo'r silly tongues," cried Tom, "that 's more than I know mysen; the gentleman as yo seen is at th' Cat and Fiddle, and if yo wanten to know yo can go and axe there." With that Tom lifted the portmanteau from the ground, and bearing it away from the midst of the inquisitive throng whose heads were all meeting over it, deposited it carefully in a corner of his house, and refusing to answer one of the thousand questions still put to him, began busily opening his money bag, and from a roll of papers began to hand out to each person the money that belonged to him. This had the most decided effect; all thoughts were instantly turned from the stranger to more closely-touching concerns, and Tom Fletcher speedily dismissed his crowd and turned to his supper, that stood ready prepared for him by his pretty niece. Here, however, the black portmanteau again fell directly under his eye, and he found a crowd of questions rising on his own mind as numerous and as busy as those of his neighbours had been. The eyes of the niece followed his, and no doubt she would have given a trifle to know something about the stranger gentleman too, but she was too well acquainted with her uncle's humour to utter a single remark. She only took care to help the hungry man to his steak, set the tankard of cool ale just before him, and had his pipe ready to hand to him when he had finished. Over this Tom pondered a good while, endeavouring to fish up out of the regions of his youthful memory some John Fox, but in vain. He nodded, snatched up his candle, and went to bed.

Weary as he was, and accustomed to indulge him-

self in an extra hour or two of sleep on a Sunday morning, yet Tom Fletcher was up, had his breakfast, fed and cleaned out his horse, and turned out his three cows that his niece had milked, and at nine o'clock was seen carrying the black portmanteau down to the Cat and Fiddle. Here he expected to find the mysterious John Fox at his breakfast in the parlour, and hoped by further talk to come at something more tangible. To his disappointment, however, he learned that the gentleman had had his breakfast in his chamber, but ordered his portmanteau to be sent up to him, and then that nobody should disturb him till dinner time, having first inquired and found that the service at the church was not till the afternoon, the single service in the village alternating each week from morning to afternoon, the clergyman having to preach also at a neighbouring village. This was rather a trying fact to Tom, and as the landlord and landlady, and half a dozen of the villagers, who had already assembled there to learn something about this important personage, for rare indeed was the arrival of any guest at that out-of-the-world hamlet, were equally curious with Tom, they put the ale cup before him, and the sun streaming into the familiar old room of the Cat and Fiddle in a way to warm and call forth the closest thoughts from the most iron breast, the whole group were soon in full discourse about the stranger, and soon had learned all that Tom knew.

There is seldom an event in nature, or in life, that the clever men of this age cannot clear up. Does a meteor appear in the sky, or a strange kind of weather come, we have all the causes of these phenomena laid by our philosophers as clearly before us, as if they had been at the ordering of the thing

Does a king or a ministry take some singular step, it was all foreseen by certain people, though they had kept their thoughts to themselves, lest they should be thought rash; but they can tell you what will be the consequences of the step. The consequences turn out to be quite different; but, then, they can directly tell you *why* this is so, and must be so —they had only overlooked some one little particular. Relate to any of the clever men of our very enlightened day, anything which you have heard that astonishes you, and they will immediately show you that there is no cause of astonishment at all—it could not be otherwise. Find out the next day that you were wrong informed, and that the facts were so and so, and your clever man will explain that also, and show that it must equally be so. There is nothing now which our clever men cannot irrefragably prove, that a thing is black to-day — that it is white to-morrow, and green the next—you only omitted some influencing cause in your statement; your premises might be wrong, but their reasoning is always right. How many political measures could we refer to that were pronounced as pregnant with national destruction if carried, which being carried, and no destruction ensuing, these very same croakers have been the first to prove that this must be so. Their reasonings were right, but some fact or facts had been carefully concealed from them. O! it is a most comfortable age, where statements may be wrong, but every body is right; and the clever people always can account for every thing!

Unfortunately for Leniscar, the philosophy of the age had not yet made its entrance there; and accordingly our group at the Cat and Fiddle, having heard Tom Fletcher's story of what had passed with the

stranger, were in a most pitiable condition. Every body asked, "Who could this Mr. Fox be?" Nobody could answer it. "It must be a thin, whipper-snapper youth that used to come and take in stockings for the hosiers at Nottingham!" said one.

"Slim, whipper-snapper youth!" cried Tom; "art thou a slim youth? I tell thee, he 's as burly as the old tower at Coldnor Castle!"

"It must be a young lawyer's clerk that used to come about the rents of Lord Ormond." Then it was an auctioneer's clerk—then a grocer's apprentice that took orders—then it was a relation of this or the other family! "Fox! Fox? who here was ever married to a Fox? Foxes in the parish there were none, and never had been in the memory of man."

It was all in vain, not a thread of probability, much less a whole clue, could be got hold of; and yet the gentleman had an old attachment to the place; he thought of ending his days there! Before church-time in the afternoon there was not a house in which this great topic and mystery had not been warmly discussed; and to such a height had the fever of curiosity risen, that, on the clergyman's entering the church, he was perfectly astonished—he had never seen such an attendance before! Whilst he was in the midst of his wonder, in walked the stranger, and the universal stir which his entrance occasioned, and the turning of all heads, and the following of all eyes, as he composedly walked up the centre aisle, convinced the clergyman that this unknown person had something to do with this unusual flocking to church.

In any tolerably populous place, Mr. John Fox would not have presented any appearance sufficiently marked to attract unusual attention. He was a stout and grave-looking man, apparently of some-

thing more than sixty. His strong broad figure was arrayed in an olive-green ample frock-coat, well buttoned up, a pair of ample grey trousers, and buckles as ample on his stout well-made shoes. His head and face were of the same full and solid character as his person. His hair was strong and gray, and, as were also his whiskers, which were white, was cut short. His countenance was of a deep ruddy hue, with large gray eyes and bushy eyebrows. His nose was of the strong, round, Oliver Cromwell stamp, and there was a massy solidity about the lower parts of the face, and a firmness about the mouth, that proclaimed a grave, clear-headed, determined character. In his left hand he carried a broadish brimmed hat, and in his right a stick of a very remarkable character, which, as it did not fail to astonish on this brief view, before its possessor was hidden, all but his head, in the pew to which he directed his steps, and afterwards was a subject of much wonder and speculation, I may as well more particularly describe.

It was, in the first place, like its master, of a very solid and substantial character, and as he set it down with a certain decided energy as he marched up the aisle, it sounded on the stone pavement, and clinked on the brass of a monumental inscription, over which he passed, with such a noticeable vigour, as attracted all eyes to it. All eyes then saw that it was of a dark yellowish hue, or, in reality, a genuine fox-colour; and as he afterwards held the head of it up to his nose, that it had actually a fox's head, most admirably and naturally carved. Besides this, it was discernible that the whole stick was marked all over with figures, which later and closer inspection proved to be on one side a most elaborate design of

Solomon's Temple, and the signs of the zodiac, stretching from the fox's head to the iron-shod end; on the other was an equally elaborate procession of the beasts to the ark of Noah, which, first of ships, was carved out as an exact counterpart of the Temple. All this tracery, which was in fact most beautifully and artistically executed, and was indeed the labour of Mr. John Fox himself, in many a leisure hour, did not fail to excite the deepest admiration and wonder in the minds of those simple villagers. The mysterious figures were soon set down to be astrological, and to enable the possessor on the spot, and at any hour, to find out and to foretell anything. Solomon, all the world over, is believed to have known everything; in the East, he has always been held to be the prince of magicians—in the West, to be master of all knowledge under the sun; and then the beasts of old Noah, it was clear enough that this grave stranger knew more than an almanack, if, indeed, he were not the almanack-maker. Every body surveyed him with deep awe.

This feeling of his strange and superior knowledge was not a little increased by the very fact of his walking leisurely into the very pew that he did. It was evident that he knew the way to the pew before he came into the church. He never looked to right or left, but walked sedately on to it, as if it had been his own; and *that pew* was in fact that of a family lately extinct in the place, and having just now no proper occupants. It was evident that the stranger knew it. Nay, he put his hand to the button inside which held the door fast, just as if he had always known the pew, seated himself so as to have at once the best view of the congregation and the clergyman, and all that in a moment, and with-

out having to make a single change. He drew a very handsome but well-worn prayer-book from his pocket, and became deeply attentive to the service.

There was no family of great worldly account in this little hamlet; merely farmers, cottagers and labourers. When the service was over Mr. Fox advanced to the clergyman and conversed a few minutes with him, then quitted the church, making a respectful bow to the people who were standing about the door, and giving Tom Fletcher a familiar shake of the hand, walked away with him and Michael Shaw the miller, or as he was usually called in the dialectical familiarity of the place, Mick Shay. Having, however, told Tom that he should call on him in the morning to have a little conversation with him, he bade Mick and him good bye at the church-yard gate, and took a solitary foot-path down the side of a wood into the valley below the village.

That afternoon and evening various were the farmers, looking over their lands, and loving couples pursuing retired walks, or seated on old stiles, who encountered the stranger. He was now seen standing at the head of Mick Shay's mill-dam, which was a sheet of water really large enough to have been honoured with the name of lake, covering perhaps not less than fifty acres, and lying between upland slopes, varied with green enclosures, and woods charming enough, in a more known part of the country, to have made the whole scene admired for its beauty. There he was looking down where its waters shoot over the sluice and down on a flight of rude steps into the valley below, forming in truth a very fair cascade. Others saw him following solitarily the curves of the brook which this water formed down this valley, and which winded about, now

beneath tall trees, and now through the greenest meadows, in true sylvan loveliness. Others again saw him standing on the steps of Mick Shay's wind-mill, on the hill near, for this worthy miller had two strings to the bow of his trade, and ground with both wind and water; and from the airy height of the said wind-mill steps, overlooking the wide vale below, which for miles spread itself out in most peaceful and rich beauty. By others again he was met in a distant and deep wood. Of several persons, when they came up to him, or he to them, he had asked who still lived in this farm-house and that cottage, and had merely remarked, "O, indeed! such a family, I believe, once lived there." In every case he was right. The man must certainly once have known this neighbourhood well—who *could* he be? This, however, was a question which was not likely to be soon answered. In consequence of his interview the next morning with Tom Fletcher, he was conducted by him to an old cottage near his own, inhabited by its proprietors, Gabriel and Becky Thorpe. These were two old but hale people without children, who living on their own little patrimony, had passed through life as through a quiet dream—their cow, their orchard, and garden, and their little bit of land below, reaching in fact to the margin of Leniscar dam—Mick Shay's mill-dam, having found them at once just enough labour and support. Here John Fox was installed to his heart's content in the parlour and one chamber of this old cottage, which lay in the midst of its old garden, and surrounded by a perfect sea of great old fruit-trees. In this cottage and its garden, orchard and croft, John Fox seemed perfectly to luxuriate in a quiet delight. They were still, secluded, and old-fashioned enough, in all con-

science. The parlour was lofty enough not to require him to stoop, and that was all. It had two casement windows looking out into two parts of that sunny garden. In those windows stood pots of balm of Gilead, balsams, and myrtles. There was a squab or wooden sofa in the room set against the wall near the fire-place, which having on it a well-stuffed cushion and pillow seemed to invite to many a pleasant after-dinner doze. There was a dark old walnut sloping desk by one wall, with a bookcase upon it, in which Becky Thorpe had stowed out of the way not only her great green baize-covered Bible and her few other good books, but also her best tea-things, and her best tea and sugar. These were conveyed speedily to some other place of deposit, and John Fox was put into possession of all the mysterious little drawers and slides, and secret places of this desk. A huge chest full of books and other matters arrived by Tom Fletcher's cart on the following Saturday, and the bookcase was soon filled with books, such a set of handsomely bound books as never were seen in that cottage before, and all the interior of that desk with parchments and papers that seemed of a most momentous and of man-of-property-like character. Becky Thorpe soon remarked that never for a moment did Mr. Fox leave the key either in the door of the desk or book-case when he was out, never once did he even lay one of his books about. A most particular man he is, said she, exact to a hair about everything, and very solemn, and sometimes of an awful frame of mind, though still very pleasant, and what pleased her and her Gabriel especially, very religious.

"One can see plainly," Becky Thorpe would say to her neighbours, "that he has had his trials and his experiences in this life, though he is not a man

that lets you see far into his affairs, nor into his thoughts, excepting when he pleases. He reads a chapter in the Bible every morning after breakfast, and reads prayers every night before he goes to bed, and he has Gabriel and me to go in and hear him, which is a comfort to us. And my! how he can read. It's really more solemn and affecting than our parson's reading i' th' pulpit. And he will often come and sit with us of an evening, and talk with us about our past life and experience, and it 's quite a privilege to hear how he does talk. Oh, he is very book-larned, and has such a sweet spirit o' religion as warms my old heart but to listen to his words."

But before we go farther into Becky's account of John Fox, we will give some farther account of his dwelling. He had soon not only his books and papers, but Tom Fletcher had to convey from Nottingham carpets and hearthrugs which he had purchased for both parlour and bed-room, and not only that but a nice carpet also for those old stairs up to his room. Some hundreds of years had that old house stood, but such a thing as a bit of carpet in it there had never been before. "Oh, he has been used, one can see," said Becky, "to grand houses and grand ways. I and my oud man we are a'most afeard of going up and down stairs, and I've bought Gabriel a pair of listing slippers to slip over his shoes when he goes up stairs."

And really those little low rooms, with their neat carpets and clean casements, with their snowy-white curtains and their flower pots within, and the honeysuckles, and rosemary, and blossoming apricot boughs all about them without, were very charming. And that rustic bed with its curtains of blue and white large check, its variegated patch-work quilt, and its fair

sheets, was attractive enough looking to make the old gentleman betake himself to bed at the early hour of nine, as he often did. Nor was the garden less alluring. This was a longish square enclosure, surrounded by tall hedges of lilacs, many of them of the old white lilac kind that shoot up almost into trees, and they were here and there intermingled with syringas, promising in the course of a few weeks to burst out into whole oceans of beauty and fragrance. At the bottom was a rustic arbour where John Fox used to take his pipe and his book, and enjoy the hum of the bees which were busily flying in and out of a row of hives near. Below the garden, the old orchard extended its shade of ancient trees, and beyond that the green croft with tall hedges of hawthorn on each side extended down to the mill-dam.

As the time went on, and the lilacs and apple trees put out their young leaves and their delicious blossoms, the old gentleman seemed never wearied of traversing to and fro in these rural enclosures. There was not an old-fashioned flower or plant that he did not seem to contemplate with delight as an old acquaintance. The very stone-crop on the wall, the great spurge, the blue monk's-hood, the commonest polyanthus, all filled him with pleasure. He was soon acquainted with some famous old florists in neighbouring villages, and had purchased from them such a stock of auriculas, polyanthuses, ranunculuses, tulips, &c., as occupied almost a fourth of Gabriel Thorpe's garden, which was given up for the purpose. These were conveyed here in their pots, or were taken up out of their beds with all their soil about them, so that they were never affected by the removal; and early in the morning and late at night was Mr. Fox busy at work with his mats and his

sticks and his watering-pot, shading his precious charge from east winds, tying them up, and watering them with a gusto that was itself intense happiness. The village joiners were soon carrying in frames, the glazier following with the glazed covers and with hand-glasses, &c., and soon were seen, dropping in of a fine evening, one or more of the old florists to see their brother amateur and the flowers they had sold him.

It would have done anybody good to have seen these remarkable old village patriarchs, in their quiet way, walking about the flower-beds, and making their comments on the different plants. They were men who never, perhaps, had been twenty miles in their whole lives from their own homes, yet who had sent out flowers which yet maintained all over the kingdom the name and the fame which they gave them. In this tranquil and beautiful pursuit they had spent long and happy lives, and the very sunny stillness and repose of gardens seemed to be in their spirits. John Fox displayed a more active enthusiasm, in accordance with his energetic character, and was never weary of lifting his glasses, taking down his mats, and pointing out the advancing promises of plants, which in the coming months were to put forth all their glories.

The lake did not seem less affluent of pleasures for him. Mick Shay had offered him his boat for use whenever he wanted it, and it was a trait of delicate kindness that would have done honour to a man of far higher education and experience than Mick, that the very next day after making the offer, John Fox, on strolling down to the bottom of the meadow, found the boat swinging at the steps of a little landing-place, and fastened to a tree. Here it continued

daily to remain during the whole summer, excepting when Mick wanted it occasionally a few hours for himself. John Fox appeared to be a zealous fisherman, both with rod and net; he traversed in the boat every creek and winding of this fine piece of water, sometimes alone, lying for hours under the shade of some great overhanging tree, and reading, whilst he cast an occasional glance at his tackle; sometimes with Mick, who had a particular faculty of dropping his cast-net over the great basking pikes of the pond, or of lifting them out with a noose: sometimes also Gabriel Thorpe accompanied the old gentleman to act as rower, but he told Becky that for a keen fisherman, as Mr. Fox was, it was very odd sometimes to see how he would forget what he was about, and would let a great fish lug and drag at his line till it almost pulled his rod out of his hand, whilst he seemed sunk in a brown study. "Nay," said he, "I have fairly seen the fish so eager to bite that they have jumped up two or three at a time at his fly till they have actually knocked their noses together, and yet he has never seen them." Then again, according to Gabriel, he would start up and begin fishing in desperate earnest, and would have him push on the boat now hither and thither, now under this bank, and now under the other, till as quickly getting tired he would put the rod into Gabriel's hand and begin to read.

In one of these fishings, however, Gabriel made a mistake that caused Mr. Fox to omit taking him for a long time afterwards. John Fox was sunk into one of his thoughtful moods one fine sunny afternoon, when he suddenly heard Gabriel, who was in the boat, say, "Nicholas Flamstead? Why that 's the Clockmaker!"

John Fox started from his reverie, darted a keen

and astonished glance at Gabriel, and saw him looking at the fly-leaf of the volume, which he had laid down in the boat, and gazing on the name written there, which had occasioned this sudden query and exclamation. A deeper colour, a solemn and a severe expression passed over the features of John Fox, as he took hold of Gabriel's shoulder, and said, "Gabriel, what are you doing? That was the name and that was the book of a once dear friend of mine. You know not what a shock you have sent through me by the sudden utterance of his name. Promise me solemnly that as long as I remain in your house, you never pronounce it again, or look into book or paper of mine."

Gabriel closed the volume in haste, for he was of a very placid, shrinking nature—begged a thousand pardons, and was glad when he could escape out of the boat—where Mr. Fox continued for some time to fish with a grave earnestness, but without uttering another sound. Deep were the cogitations of Gabriel and Becky, however, when he reached home, on this incident, for they knew something of the Clockmaker's history, and were extremely anxious to know more. But they did not dare to put any single query to their inmate on the subject. He himself, however, one evening introduced the topic, said, of course they knew much of his early friend's history; what happy days they had spent together at the native village of the Clockmaker, not far off.

Then did Becky venture to say, "Oh, dear sir, can you tell us what is become of him? What would not some in this country give to know!"

"I know it, I know it, Mrs Thorpe," returned John Fox, while a very sad expression settled on his features; "many and earnest, as you are aware, have been the inquiries made after him, but no one,

I believe, has yet been able to trace him farther than the Cape of Good Hope."

The farther particulars which followed in conversation, we shall soon have to detail in the course of our narrative; we will, therefore, take another necessary previous view of our friend John Fox, in the company of his two frequent associates, Tom Fletcher and Mick Shay.

CHAPTER III.

DOUBLE LIGHTS ARE THROWN ACROSS JOHN FOX.

Two months had now rolled on since the arrival of John Fox in Leniscar. He had fished, and had seen his flowers come out with great delight. He was found to be a great walker, and would set off and stroll far and wide through the neighbouring country and hamlets, returning only to his supper. The mystery which hung around him was not one whit dispersed. The ideas of his wealth and importance were much heightened. He had letters directed to him from London, with great seals, and addressed "John Fox, Esquire." It was known that he had been a friend of the Clock-maker's, whose mysterious history had excited a deep interest in this part of the country, but no one could draw from him a single syllable more than what he had voluntarily uttered to Gabriel and Becky Thorpe. He had a serious and dignified manner, that inspired the deepest respect in the minds of the villagers, and the more so, as since his arrival, there was no case of distress or of illness which Mick Shay or the village doctor was not commissioned to relieve, from a source that they never mentioned, but which no one hesitated to

set down as Mr. Fox. As he passed the very children by the road-side or on the green, he filled them with a nameless awe by the serious look with which he regarded them, and yet, out of his capacious coat-pockets they would very often find nuts, gingerbread, and some half-pence suddenly flung amongst the marbles that they were playing with, which occasioned a busy scramble, to which, however, the strange man never gave the slightest attention, but was gone on, striding solemnly away with his fox-stick in his hand. Nay, on one occasion he had sorely frightened a little girl, who, with a heavy basket, in her hurry to get over a stile to which he was approaching, had left a piece of mud from her shoe on the top rail. "Now, my little maiden," said John Fox, gravely pointing with his awful hieroglyphic stick to the mud, "can you tell me how I am to get over here without dirtying my trousers?"

The little girl, in her fright at being thus addressed by so great a gentleman, clapped down her basket in precipitation, and was about to wipe away the mud with the little shawl which she had on her shoulders. "Nay," said John Fox, laying hold on her, "for that your mother would scold you. We can do better than that." So saying, he took his own pocket-handkerchief, wiped off the mud, and rolling up the handkerchief said, "There, I think you will mind better in future." The little girl, half out of her wits, and with tears in her eyes, dropped a low curtsey, and said "Yes, sir."—"I believe you, my pretty little maid—so give that handkerchief to your mother; she can have it for the washing."

The little damsel hurried home with her load to relate her adventure, and when the mother unfolded the handkerchief, out dropped a guinea! The

mother hurried as fast as the child had hurried home, to Mr. Fox with the money. "Well," said the old gentleman, "it is an old saying, 'Where there is mud there is money'—and so it is, you see; probably it stuck in the mud—it is none of mine; if you do not like it, give it to the child."

The place where John Fox was generally to be found in an evening was Tom Fletcher's. It was but a few steps from his own abode, and there was sure to be found also Mick Shay. These were the two people whose conversation he seemed still most to affect. After his almost daily rambles, he had a thousand questions to ask them of the places and people where he had been, and this led to conversations in which the history of the whole country was included. The homely humour and shrewd good sense that marked the communications of these two villagers, seemed to have a peculiar relish for him; and, in truth, they were of that sterling, though rough old English stamp, that cannot fail to please those who are charmed to find true sagacity and sound principles in the lowliest forms and most obscure situations. Tom, as we have seen, had a crabbed way with him, but he was sound at heart as oak itself. Mick was a very different person. He was not more than five-and-thirty years of age, was tall and somewhat spare in person, though remarkably strong and active. He always wore a light gray coat with pearl buttons, and a white hat, because his trade did not suit dark colours. His face was somewhat long and thin, and had a mixed expression of kindliness and quiet humour. He was naturally of a sociable, but not merry temperament. In his youth he had been reckoned somewhat wild, and fond of resorting to wakes and fairs; but that was not

because he was of a dissipated turn, but because he was fond of all kind of active sports, and exhibitions of the like kind, as racing, wrestling, running, and so on. In these matters he had been too eager a better, as well as actor, and that to his own cost. In a wrestling match he had somewhat injured one of his knees, and went with a slight stiffness in it; and there were those who said that he had lamed his business by those feats to a still more serious degree. Be that as it may, Mick was universally allowed to be one of the shrewdest and wittiest fellows in the whole neighbourhood; yet he was reckoned anything but a prosperous man. He now stayed more and more at home, and seemed to have turned all his wrestling and running habits into his tongue. He was a great arguer, a great talker, and that in a quiet, but original style, that was most picturesque and amusing, and that generally soon brought the less clever wits of the neighbourhood into a regular entanglement. John Fox delighted above all things to draw him out, and hear him talk. He said that it was to him like looking on a green meadow in May, all full of cowslips and daisies, and orchis blossoms, to hear Mick talk, there were such flowery colours mixed up with such a racy and yet exuberant humour in his speech. He had a peculiar way in showing the follies of men, by driving them to an extravagance. Thus Mr. Fox was saying one evening that he had been in various countries, and found one of the greatest comforts everywhere, as well as the greatest conducives to health, was the avoidance of soft beds and too softly-cushioned chairs. "There is laziness and disease in them," said he, "and in hot climates, the very plague; I always sleep, by preference, on a mattress."

"Why, Mester," said Mick, "I wonder you dunna lie at once on a board. If a mattress be so much healthier than a feather-bed, how much healthier and agreeabler must a good deal board be than a mattress. There now, you're sitting in a chair with a rush bottom—don't you think you'd be a deal healthier and comfortabler sitting on that three-legged stool? Nay, blame me if I don't think that you ought to have nother chair nor stool, but to set down a post and rail on the house floor to sit on. Or what think you of a roughish faggot pretty well stuffed with thorns? That would be very cool and healthy, and not at all conducive to luxurious laziness."

"These are extremes, Mick—silly extremes."

"Ay, Mester, and I'm fond of th' wise extremes—that is, something extremely comfortable. Oh dunna tell me about feather-beds being unhealthy! Of a winter night how softly and warmly they close up about you! Oh then you're as snug as an apple in a dumpling."

"That's the very thing, Mick," said John Fox, "that makes a bed so unhealthy; there is no circulation of air—you are closed up, as you say, like an apple in dough."

"Circulation of air! Oh hang it, who wants a circulation of air on a winter's night? Circulation o' warmth, that's what I want. Odd's, Mester, if you want a circulation of air you may have it any day on the top of my mill; but, thank goodness, as for me, I'm not a windmill-sail, but a miller."

At this sally Tom Fletcher burst out into hearty laughter, and Mr. Fox was fain to join in it; he saw that he might just as well have convinced Mick that Mahommedanism was better than Christianity as that mattresses were better than feather-beds.

"I'll tell you what, Mester," said Mick the next day as they were on the mill-dam fishing, "if you are so fond of hard lying and hard living you should have such a wife as our friend Tom's was. Thank heaven!—I hope it 's no sin to say so—that she is in her grave now, for Tom had a hard life of it with her; and now he has a very neat and kind niece, that makes his house like a little palace of comforts."

"What, was Tom's wife miserly?"

"Miserly! She'd skin a flint for breakfast, and split a straw and roast it for dinner. It was all scrape, scrape, scrape with her. If you'd have flung a shilling into this dam before her face, she'd have jumped in, with the best will in the world, and drowned herself in the hope of picking up the shilling as a ghost, and carrying it into the other world with her. Do ye know, she kept a shop, and I used to serve her with flour; but it was always a regular battle to get any money for it. Once the account was seventy pounds; so I goes in and says, 'I've a big payment to-morrow, Martha—perhaps you'd let me have that bit of an oddment for flour.'"

"'Eh well-a-day, how thou dost talk,' said she; 'it 's but an hour sin that greedy grocer was here from Nottingham; he 's always a coming is that rat-faced fellow, and he 's drained me as dry as a bone. In a bit I'll see what I can do for thee.'

"That had been her story for two months, so I got up to come away.

"'Sit thee down, Mick,' said Tom; 'and now, oud lady, up stairs with thee and down with the mony and pay him.'

"'Bless thee, lad! I tell thee I have not a farthing, if it war to save my life.'

"'But I say, pay him;—do'st hear?'

" ' Oh never mind—never mind,' says I, ' another day will do, though I was at my wit's end for money, but I was afeard of making words between a man and his wife.'

" ' Sit thee down, Mick,' said Tom more earnestly.

" ' No,' said I, ' I 'm going; good night.'

" Tom started up, and holding his fist over my head, said firmly, ' Other sit thee down, Mick, or I 'll knock thee down. Thou *shall* have it, I tell thee, and so no more about it.'

" The moment the old woman heard this up she jumped as nimble as a young lass, and up stairs she went, and before a man could say ' Jack Robinson,' she was down with the money, and said, ' Well done, Mick, lad, I was only joking.'

" Now would you believe it, Mester, that old body had stuffed the house, almost from top to bottom, with bank-notes? When she lay on her deathbed, the cat, frightened by a strange dog, flew up stairs and up her bed-curtains and on to the bed-tester, and down comes a lot of something all ringling and jingling all over the floor; and what was it but guineas and crowns and half-crowns, a whole pot full, that she had hidden and that the cat had upset.

" One day Tom was folding up a heap of stockings that he had bought from some poor maker, and was going to take to sell to some hosier in Nottingham, when he felt a something like a lump in one, puts in his hand and pulls out—what? why just twenty pounds' worth of bank paper.

" ' Now that 's thy doing, Martha,' said he to his wife as she lay in bed just by, ' Isn't that a silly sort of a place to hide money in? I might ha taken this to th' hosiers, and where would it ha been then?'

" ' But thou didn't take it,' said she very quietly,

'and so th' hosier did not get it. What would ta have, man?'

"Well, no sooner is th' old woman's corpse out of the house than Tom sends for me, and we begins a regular hunt. We turned up beds, ripped up beds and mattresses, pulled down curtains, pulled open all drawers, felt all about th' inside o' th' desk, up th chimney, under the thatch, nay into the very pigsty and everywhere there was money, money, money, just like whisps o' hay. 'Good gracious!' says I, 'what eyes must Martha have had for hiding-holes; but, Tom, where war *thy* eyes?' For years and years had this poor old cretur been hoarding, and hiding, and it's ten to one if we have found above half her money, but what we did find bought and paid for a whole farm, I can tell ye."

"Tom is rich, then?" said John Fox. "I am very glad to hear it. But with such property why does he go slaving to Nottingham every week?"

"Oh, Tom thinks the folks could not carry on without him. I've often asked him to give it up and make himself easy and comfortable in his old age. But he turned sharp on me, and said, 'What, thou wants to be rid o' me, dost ta. Didst ever know an old tree shifted that did not die? 'I'll retire,' says an old tradesman; ay, and he generally retires into his grave! I tell thee, Mick, when a man has been active all his life, when he stops he stagnates. His blood becomes full of melancholy, and he 's gone. Stop a brook that has been running, and turn it into a pool, and what is it?—a puddle!' When is it that it is clear, and singing, and good for anything? While it is running. Stop it, and you've done for it! I've been going all my life, Mick; and when I stop, I shall stop altogether!

No, no, nother Smiler nor me want to *retire* yet, as they call it—first *tire*, say I, and then *retire*. But we 're neither of us yet so hard up as that comes to. No, I shall go on yet, if it were only to carry the young things their bits o' love-letters, and to bring th' mester's letters and newspapers. When I want to go to sleep under a sod, why, then, I shall cry 'wo!' for the last time, to old Smiler—and, depend upon it, it will be 'wo' to us!'"

The three acquaintances chatted on from evening to evening in Tom Fletcher's house, or under the trees in Gabriel's garden, with their pipes, and pots of Cat-and-Fiddle ale, calm and cheerful as the sun which often cast its setting beams upon them there, when a single incident threw a rocket, as it were, in amongst them, and made them leap up and fly a dozen ways—here, there, yonder! and that to some purpose. Let us see what this was, in another chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

A STARTLING SIGHT INTRODUCES A STRANGE STORY.

It was one evening about Midsummer that John Fox, after one of his long rambles, entered hastily into Tom Fletcher's, where Tom and Mick Shay were hoping for his arrival. He looked flushed, heated, and dusty. His usual armed-chair was standing ready for him, and Tom's pretty niece rose, made a curtsey, and drew the curtain to exclude a blaze of sunshine which fell directly on the chair. But Mr. Fox, instead of seating himself, took a hasty turn through the apartment, and then wiping his brow, which displayed profuse perspiration, said.

"How's this, my friends? Do you know what I have seen? Do you know what has taken place?"

"What's that?" said both, at once, rising from their chairs.

"Why, I have this afternoon strolled round by Dainsby, and as I reached the gates of the old Hall, what did I see? A sight that I could not have believed could have been in this world. A sight worse than if the ghost of my father had risen from the grave and bade me follow him quick into the earth! Can the villain dare even that? Are there no bounds to his rascality? Is there nothing but the utter annihilation of all that is ancient and venerable that will satisfy him? That petty demon of an attorney has at last put the finishing stroke to his presumption, and if he be not stopped all is over!"

As John Fox finished this sentence, he stood staring at Mick Shay without giving them a single ray of information on the subject of his excitement.

"But what is it, mester?" asked Mick. "What 's amiss? Can we be of any use? Tell us, can we run for help anywhere?"

"Ay, run, fly, fetch help, both of you—let 's see, where are my papers?"

"Here are pen and ink, sir," said Tom's pretty niece, reaching a little table and placing these articles on it.

"I forget," said John Fox, "my papers are at home—but it matters not, this will do." And with this he seemed to collect himself a moment, and, looking at the two astonished men, he said:

"Would you believe that Dainsby Old Hall is going to be pulled down? Would you believe that that pestilent pettifogger Screw Pepper, has had the audacity to doom the old mansion of the Flamsteads to the hammer, and that, not as a whole, safe and

sound with the estate, but piecemeal, to be pulled down by scoundrelly bricklayers and carpenters; and to be converted into a heap of dusty scantlings and brickbats, and dispersed to the four winds of heaven to build hóvels and pigsties out of!"

"Dainsby Old Hall to be pulled down?" cried both Tom and Mick, in a breath. "Impossible! They may as well talk of pulling down the church."

"But I tell you they do not *talk* about it; they are actually proceeding to do it. They have doomed it, have marked and condemned it. I have seen it with my own eyes, and we must be quick or the ruin will begin."

With this John Fox drew a large handbill from his pocket, and holding it up, they could see, in large letters, the words "Dainsby Old Hall," and something, in letters nearly as gigantic, about "Lots" and "Building Materials." Having displayed this a moment, the old gentleman, as if calmed by the act, seated himself in his chair, and gazing on Tom and Mick intently, who also reseated themselves on the old squab opposite, he thus proceeded, in a tone and language that presented a singular contrast to his preceding excited address:

"I say, I strolled round to Dainsby, and I think I never saw it and the country about it looking more beautifully than in the summer richness of the present time. All was so green, leaves and pasturage, all so fresh, and tender, and luxuriant. The uplands all strewn with flowers of all hues; the meadows so deep in grass already. The birds everywhere singing; the people everywhere busy as in the joy of their hearts. All at once a peacock shouted from a great elm-tree by the parsonage, and that called my thoughts as by magic to the Old Hall. Ah! thought I, how joyous and how beautiful it used to be there,

and how melancholy it must be now. How often have I heard in my young days the peacocks scream from its lofty trees, and now it stands empty and desolate. If I should go past, I suppose I should hear nothing but the sparrows wrangling about its roof, and hanging their long hay-tufts of nests from its eaves. I should see nothing but weeds and decaying wood-work and grown-up paths, where all used to be so cheerful and so happy. A sort of melancholy fascination drew me. I would go there; I would pass and see what a sad spectacle it was. But what was that I saw at a distance, not sparrows on the roof, but men. I was struck with a strange feeling. What! They *are* men? My eyes do not deceive me? Yes, there they are. At the very top. They have ladders and are ascending to the very cupola, to the very vane. There again, and others walking along the broad parapet! Nay, there are some actually in the balcony over the principal entrance. What does it mean?

"I hastened onward with a feverish eagerness, and yet with a cold sensation at my heart. They were workmen, joiners, bricklayers, and the like. I could now see them plainly. And below, there in the court, are more of them! What will they do? Is the old place sold? Will the purchaser repair it? But if so, why all these men at once here scrambling up like so many flies about it? And *such* men, for there seem to me to be as many masters as workmen. And here again, what is this? Before the gates stood, drawn up, gigs, carts, shandry-dans. What can it mean? Are they valuers, sent by men who wish to purchase?

"I drew nearer. Yes, there is a sale intended. I see the great hand-bills on the gate-posts and in the

upper windows. But what is that? I came still nearer, and a strange horror seized me! I beheld chalked on the front of the house—on its roof, on its very cupola—in mammoth-like letters, 'Lot 14,' 'Lot 20,' 'Lot 25,' &c. The truth flashed at once upon me; they will sell the fine old place for materials; they will pull it down; and here are the birds of prey gathered already around the carcase!

"With trembling knees I advanced to one of the great gate-posts, and read what confirmed all my fears,—what stands here!"

John Fox again held up the great hand-bill, and then flung it on the table before him.

When Tom and Mick had both satisfied their curiosity, and expressed their astonishment over the hand-bill, John Fox seemed to take up the thread of his thoughts.

"I never till to-day," continued he, "felt what a strange sensation it is to see a solid, substantial thing that you love stand before you—stand as if it made part of the earth itself, and yet feel that in a few days it will have vanished from the spot as if it were a mere dream. Dainsby Old Hall! why, it is connected with my ideas of Dainsby as much as the very church, or the very ground on which it is built. One would just as soon expect the hills that rise all around to skip away, the brook that has always run down the valley, to disappear, and not even leave the channel it has run in. There stood the old hall, as I gazed on it, as solid, as ponderous, as stately, as venerable as ever, and yet I knew that if nothing extraordinary interposed in a fortnight, it would be all down and dispersed like a house of cards. Is it possible? said I to myself; can that old house of the Flamsteads be thus really conjured away like an

egg from under a hat? Why, it has stood there I reckon these three hundred years, just as it does now. There are all its walls, its windows, its gables, and its cornices—they are no shadows. There are all its rooms and passages—the very papers and the pictures on the walls—the very furniture which has been used by so many individuals of the family and their friends—and I can see as plainly, as if I were in it, every nook, and corner, and closet. There is the old French settee on which the late Mrs. Flamstead used to sit at her work-table—there is the billiard-table at which we have had many a merry game—there are the old gentleman's desk and his easy-chair, so worn out at the elbows. I see the very stag's horns on which he used to hang his spurs and his riding-whip. There are the old-fashioned screens, and the rich cabinets sent from China by their cousin the merchant; and, in short, all through the house, there is not a thing that has not a history and a value that would draw tears from the very dead, at the bare idea of their being carried away. Carried away! that is little; the very rooms shall be annihilated, turned into spaces of common air, into nothing! It seemed to me as if such a thing was impossible. They are real, human things! said I. They are—they must be—they cannot be otherwise! What! shall I walk past here a month hence and there shall be no Dainsby Old Hall? Let the earth vanish as soon!

"And then I began running over in my head, or rather in my heart, all the events which had stamped a value on this house, and which belonged to it, and it alone. I saw gay wedding-parties issue from it amid the peal of merry bells and the fluttering of white favours. I saw gay, handsome, laughing, and

tearful faces; they were like April mornings, all dew, and sunshine, and beauty. I saw gay, handsome parties again alight at the gate, and enter it, there was feasting—there was joy! I saw eager faces hurry through passages and across the court; and there were hasty but joyous feet; the church-bells again burst forth with their riot of gladness—there was an heir born! O! how many of these gladsome events have there been at this old house! What gay, active, happy forms and faces; what young families, bound heart and hand, have grown up here! And then there were death-beds, and slow-pacing hearses—old and honoured people, who left life-long histories here, were going away. Nay, there came such a train of such things across me, that I became desperate. I clenched my hand at the people coming out to their gigs, talking of their future bargains, of lots, and sectioned masses of these sacred walls, and laughing at what they called the lumber of wigged and gowned ancients that would go to the brokers to be palmed off as people of some account. These fellows, I have no doubt, thought me mad; for, snatching that hand-bill from one of them, I said, 'Scoundrels! you have not yet clutched your prey!' and broke away in a state of frenzy.

"And yet I was much to blame. The men were innocent men enough. They have nothing to do but to follow their trade and make their bargains; but there is one villain who must be stopped, let it cost what it may, Mick. Let us have the horse and taxed-cart here in half-an-hour; I must be off to Derby to-night. Tom, you must away to Ripley to the post, with a letter."

At this Mick Shay disappeared with long strides; Tom put on his carter's frock and hastened to supper

up his horse, and in the meantime Mr. Fox wrote his letter; and in half-an-hour Tom was posting off, stick in hand, and Mick and Mr. Fox drove off in the opposite direction at a spanking rate; for Mick disdained any but first-rate cattle, and his tall bay mare went at a speed that would see them at Derby within the hour. While they are thus gone there, on important business, let us go back a good many years and learn something more particular about Dainsby Old Hall.

CHAPTER V.

THE FLAMSTEADS AND THEIR FORTUNES.

The Flamsteads had been residents at Dainsby for a vast period of time, probably from before the Norman Conquest; but they had not been the possessors of what was called the Old Hall for half that time. It was generally said to have been built in the reign of Edward VI. They had acquired possession of it only after the civil wars. Till then, they had been plodding farmers—a portion of the old yeomanry of England. The Dainsbys became then extinct, and the younger Flamstead of the time, having risen to a captainey in the parliamentary army, was enabled, by favour at head-quarters, to make a cheap bargain for the Hall and its estate. This estate did not exceed five hundred acres, a good deal of it of strong wheat land. The Flamsteads removed into the Hall, and continued to cultivate the land themselves, maintaining a station something like that of a gentleman-farmer, before, however, such a compound term was known. They were, in fact, gentry, yet never associated, nor aimed to do so, with the chief gentry of the country. They seemed to prefer preserving

the plain and plodding character of the family, to seeking, by higher accomplishment and ambition, to raise themselves in the county-scale, and to connect themselves with its wealthier families by marriage, thus probably increasing the estate itself. Nay, the two great highways to advancement, for those who had a portion, and yet but a moderate portion of the soil of their country—the church and the law—they never entered upon. One would have thought that this would have been the most natural way of securing an establishment for the younger sons; but the plain truth was, that they never seemed to seek any sort of support for these. The eldest son always took the estate; the daughters always married off pretty well, for it was a handsome family; but the second son, and there was, strangely enough, rarely more than two sons, and often not more than one, was often a sort of head-farmer or manager for the elder brother; and if they did not agree, was often little better than a vagabond. Once, indeed, the second son in his old age actually worked on the roads, and the family did not seem to trouble itself about it at all. This poor, good-natured fellow, because he could not tolerate the overbearing airs and niggardly conduct of the elder brother, had disdained to remain under any obligations to him, but applied at once to the parish for relief, thinking this would pique his brother to different conduct; but, strange enough, the brother came forward and said he thought that it was a very good idea, and proposed that he should be made permanent repairer of the road, with a cottage and a fixed salary. "We have always been workers," said the elder Flamstead, "work is no disgrace; and it makes very little difference whether our Guy (the brother) level the clods in the fields or those on the

roads." The post was given to this Guy Flamstead; and those persons who are actors in our story, John Fox, Tom Fletcher, and even Mick Shay, could well remember Guy when an old man, still following this vocation. He was a very good-natured old fellow, fond of a sup of ale, and not at all hurting himself by labour. He might be seen slowly sauntering along the highway, somewhere about the village, with a shovel and a mud-rake over his arm; but still oftener were these implements to be seen reared at the ale-house door, and old Guy to be found comfortably seated with some of his village cronies within. Yet one circumstance, well attested, will not allow us to believe that old Guy Flamstead was insensible to the injustice of the family custom that excluded the younger sons from a share of the family property; for once when a notoriously wicked and covetous old fellow was on his death-bed, he went to visit him, and thus addressed him—"Well, so the doctor says you are not long for this world. You 'll be sure to see my father in the next world—birds of a feather will flock together, I warrant 'em, there. So be sure to tell him that my brother Simon treads very faithfully in his steps. He has turned me out on the roads, you can say; and now he has himself got a second son to follow me!"

The second son, Guy's nephew, here alluded to, was the clockmaker, who, we have incidentally seen, was the mystery of the neighbourhood. This youth, as he advanced into his teens, displayed a considerably thoughtful, and at the same time steady, character. He saw his old uncle Guy on the roads and his father in the possession of wealth. He heard that this had always been the case in the family, and asked why it should be so? At this question every

body opened their eyes very wide. His father stared, his brother laughed, but as neither the stare nor the laugh at all cleared up his ideas about the injustice of this arrangement, he again asked the question more loudly than before. On this his father said, "Nick, dost thou* think thyself wiser than all the generations that have gone before thee? Dost thou ask why the eldest son takes the estate? 'Tis to keep the estate together, to be sure. Where would it have been now, think'st thou, if every younger Flamstead before our time had carried off a part of it? I tell thee, the auctioneer's hammer would have knocked it into a thousand shivers."

"Ay, that would it," said his brother, laughing again, "and neither thou nor I, Nicholas, would have gotten an atom of it, so thou sees it is a deal better as it is, for now *I* get a good thing, and thou gets just as much as thou would have had at any rate."

"But just tell me one thing, father," said Nicholas Flamstead, now arrived at the sagacious age o seventeen, "what reason is there in making one son a gentleman and the next one a beggar? Is there any such great virtue in coming a few days or years earlier into the world?"

"Well, I reckon there is," said the father; "it was always thought so, at least people always acted as if they thought so, and I don't pretend to be wiser than those who went before me. Besides, I expect I can do as I like with my own."

"Only be sure that it is your own first, father," replied Nicholas calmly.

The old man and the elder son opened their eyes wider than ever.

* In this rude and primitive part of the country this form of the pronoun was always familiarly used, and even is frequently so used to the present day.

"Yes," repeated Nicholas, "be sure of that, or it may bring a trouble after it. It seems to me that when God gives children, he makes it a duty, a holy, a religious duty to act justly towards them. They are all *his* children entrusted to your keeping for a while; and if he give you substance to support them on, and you give *all* to *one* and *none* to *all but one*, will he not one day ask you a question or two about your stewardship?"

The old man stared harder than ever.

"Nick," said he, "who taught thee all this fine talk? I never heard such in all my life before. I never heard th' parson talk in that way."

"Then make me a parson, father," rejoined Nicholas, "and I will talk that way from the pulpit, for it is high time."

"Parson!" exclaimed the brother. "Parson!" exclaimed the old man. "No! 'Od rabbit thee. There never yet was a parson Flamstead in Dainsby. No, I see what thou would be at; thou would be tithing thy elder brother's lands."

"Oho! that 's it, Nick, is it?" said the brother; "so, if thou canst not have the estate thou will at least try to skim the cream off it. A pretty parson thou would make. One may see already what sort of a lecture one should get though. No, Nick, no—I would much rather see thee clerk than parson."

"Well, let me be a clerk, then," said Nicholas; "let me be a tradesman, or what you will—only one thing I can tell you, I do not mean to be a beggar and a hanger-on."

At these words so astonished was the old man, who sate at his favourite evening's employment of winding worsted from off a reel into balls for his wife to knit with, that up he started in such a hurry that he knocked down the reel.

"There," said Nicholas, very composedly, raising the reel again from the floor, "it has reeled a long time, but it has fallen at last."

Neither father nor son saw the excellence of Nicholas's pun, for they were too much amazed and confounded at his daring doctrines, and especially at his idea of being a tradesman. No Flamstead had been a tradesman for generations; they might be farmers, might be outcasts, might work on the roads; but a tradesman! that was a strange idea. They could not have believed that a Flamstead could have been so mean-spirited.

But Nicholas was still more mean-spirited; for without any further ceremony he marched off to the little town of Alfreton, and apprenticed himself to a clockmaker! If the clock had walked out of the church-steeple, and gone chiming all round the village; or if they had awoke some morning and found the said steeple standing on the point of its spire, it would not have more startled the inmates of Dainsby Old Hall. It was such a degradation as had never before befallen the Flamsteads in any age. Old Guy had been, it is true, a common labourer on the roads; but what of that? That was really a gentlemanly calling. It was only mending the roads that belonged to the Flamsteads, as the Flamsteads mended their acres; and besides, it was all in the parish. In Dainsby parish what did it signify?—there stood the Old Hall to say to anybody that the Flamsteads were gentlefolks. But in a strange town, and in a little shop with clocks and watches in the window! Well, Nick was crack-brained, and that was the long and short of it.

"No, he'll disgrace me—he'll disgrace me," said the brother; "that's what he means, because he can have neither half the estate nor the tithe of it, and

tell me of all my sins publicly into the bargain. But there's a remedy even for that—he shall no longer be a brother of mine! I disown him—he belongs no more to the family, and so—we are not disgraced at all."

"No, that's right, Sykes," said the father, "that's right—that's a famous idea. I never thought of that. He doesn't belong to the family, and so it is no disgrace at all."

With this "famous idea" both father and son appeared perfectly satisfied. Sykes laughed at his happy conceit at least a dozen times before the day was ended. The mother, who could neither oppose them nor help her son Nicholas, was silent; but she thought, as she heard her husband and elder son often call Nicholas a mean-spirited fool, that perhaps he was no fool either. He had always had a turn for mechanics, and he would thus at least have a livelihood in his hands. She took care to send him his box of clothes, and kept up a private correspondence with him, and loaded the carrier's cart every week with good things for him, plum-cakes and fruit out of the green-house, garden, and orchard.

Nicholas did not venture for some time to visit his native home, for he could not expect a very pleasant reception from father and brother, and if it were painful to him he knew that it would be tenfold so to his mother. His father, indeed, wrote to his master, threatening to indict him for inveigling away his son; but Nicholas put an end to this by declaring that if they prevented his being a watchmaker he would turn Methodist preacher, at that time a new, and to people generally, a most odious character This had its full effect. After a while his mother intimated to him that she thought he might walk over to spend the Sunday with them. He did so,

but it was a trying time. The father and brother, who pretended not to see him at all, were continually asking what o'clock it was, and whether anybody knew of a fellow from whom they could order a good clock for the drawing-room. When Nicholas handed to his brother a spoon at dinner, he smelt at the handle, and asking his father if he did not think it smelt of Florence oil, sent it away. The poor mother, who was now roused to indignation, said, "Oil! if it do so it is the oil of fatness, which is spoken of as a blessing in the Bible, and that often in our days makes a lord mayor."

"A lord mayor! Why, did they make lord mayors out of clock-makers?"

"Yes," said the mother, "and out of worse things! Was not Dick Whittington, a mere hawker of cats, made three times lord mayor of London? And were not all the lord mayors men who had gone up to London from the country and had made fortunes in trade, and not only rode in a golden coach as grand as the king, but were often members of parliament, and received in great honour at court? Hold up thy head, my Nicholas," said she proudly, "and one day, I warrant, I shall see thee lord mayor of London."

If Mrs. Flamstead had prayed for the wisdom of Solomon, it could not have framed for her a speech so exactly adapted to the capacity of her husband and son Sykes. Lord mayor!—it was a new idea. He then, thought the old man, would be greater than the Squire of Dainsby, and so thought the elder son. From that day they neither talked of ordering clocks, nor perceived any smell of Florence oil. Nicholas came and went during the remainder of his apprenticeship, and was received with as much apparent friendliness by his father and brother as before—by his

mother with increasing affection. The first gold watch which he could put together to his own satisfaction, was presented by him to her on her birth-day, and was worn by her with delight; and the week after Nicholas received from London a box containing a set of the most perfect tools for his trade that had ever been seen in the country, with a fine microscope and a life of Flamstead the astronomer, a branch of their family, with these lines written in it—"Go on, Nicholas Flamstead, and confer the like lasting honour on your family; if not through science—then through virtue."

It must have been at this period that our friend John Fox was the comrade of Nicholas Flamstead, and accompanied him in those frequent visits to Dainsby, which appeared to have made indelible and delightful impressions on his memory; but whence John Fox came, or who he was, does not by any means appear. Could he be a fellow-apprentice? Or could he be some young lawyer's clerk of the little town of Alfreton? Or was he—but we have never met with any one who could give a clear answer to these queries; and John Fox was, of all persons, the most reserved on the subject. It seemed to affect him deeply, and make him, as a friend was once heard to express it, "introvert himself, and roll himself up in his inner man into the compass of a half-penny ball." We will leave these unprofitable questions, therefore, and pursue the history of Nicholas.

On the expiration of his short apprenticeship, he went to London to perfect himself—if with the hope of being one day lord mayor, he did not succeed—for, a year afterwards, his old master dying, he came down to Alfreton and took his business. The opening of Nicholas Flamstead's shop was an era in that

little town. For generations had its watch and clock trade jogged on in the same easy, sleepy, unadvancing way; it was not a progress, but a stand-still in the art. At once Nicholas dismissed all the old stock, at a price that tempted the country people, who were willing to carry watches as large as turnips, and set up clocks that seemed the work of Tubal Cain. He opened on a market-day with such a blaze of new articles, as fairly struck the people dumb with amaze. What lovely little gold and silver watches! What handsome clocks and time-pieces in mahogany cases, and in gold! What new constructions of works, and what wonders had Nicholas to exhibit and explain to the customers. The consequence was, that scarcely a person within twenty miles round was now satisfied with his watch. He or she must have one of the new construction, or principle, as Nicholas called it. There was no talk but about levers, escape movements, chronometers and engine-turning, and ornamental engraving of cases.

Nicholas was soon compelled to run up a row of new workshops, light and airy, and had such a row of men at work in them, as had never been seen in Alfreton before. People said that people might live on clocks and watches instead of learn the time by them. But it was not simply for Alfreton and the country round, it was for London, that Nicholas worked. He could afford to work cheaper in this cheap neighbourhood, than could be done in London; and as his work was equal to anything there, it was ordered by London houses, and was sent down again to various towns, and even abroad.

Nicholas Flamstead was a flourishing man, and not even his father would have been ashamed of him. But during his abode in London both father and

mother were gone to their ancestors: his brother Sykes was now married, and had one little boy. Sykes's wife, who was a very delicate and lady-like woman, did not at all appear to despise the prosperous Clockmaker. Many of her own relations, in fact, in Derby, were connected with trade, and she was too sensible not to know the value of it. Nicholas took a particular fancy to his little nephew; used to carry him out on a Sunday, when he came to Dainsby, to show him the birds' nests in the hedges; and begged that they would let the little fellow, who was now four years old, come and see him. This was done at once, and often; for Mrs. Flamstead whispered to her husband that there was nothing like letting rich uncles take a fancy to children, and her husband, not quite so sagaciously, began to say, "Why, Nicholas may never marry; I shouldn't think he would. He seems quite cut out for an old bachelor, and in fact is married to his clock-making."

People are very apt to see this cut of the old bachelor about their well-to-do relations, even when they are young. In what it consists, however, it would often not be so very easy to say. I am sure it would not in the case of Nicholas Flamstead. He was a young, active, sensible, social man; that he admired a fair, and, still more, a sensible, woman, any body could see; that he was fond of children, was seen by his liking to his nephew. But as, in this case, the wish was probably "father to the thought," we need not here further pursue the inquiry. In short, little Henry Flamstead used often to be driven over in the carriage to his uncle's, and here, seated in a tall chair, he would sit for hours by his uncle and watch his work. It would not have been easy to say which was fonder of the other, the uncle or

the nephew. Nicholas invented all sorts of pieces of machinery for the little boy with bells and larums, which, as they noisily ran down, made the little fellow laugh till he shouted, or, as his delighted uncle said, "chinked again." Others were little men sawing, and water-wheels; and at last Nicholas even made the hardy request to present him with a splendid cuckoo clock, in a great chinese case, to stand in the hall at Dainsby. There was but one point on which he knew that his gift would find a repulsion in the feelings of the parents, and that was to see on a clock in Dainsby Old Hall, the name of a FLAMSTEAD, MAKER; but this, with a delicacy worthy of a true man of merit, he laughingly told them should not appear there till he could set under it—lord mayor of London!

Fortune now seemed to shower her favours on Nicholas; his business was such as must in a few years insure wealth, and at once wealth fell on him from another quarter. His mother's sister, whom he had merely seen when he was but a boy, as his nephew Henry was now, died and left him ten thousand pounds. She had not disdained to marry a London tradesman, and knew not only how to discover merit but how to reward it in a few words. "To my nephew, Nicholas Flamstead, Clockmaker of Alfreton, Derbyshire, who disdained to be useless to society, and was too proud to be a gentlemanly beggar—Ten Thousand Pounds."

"Well, now Nick will drop the clocks and watches to a certainty," said his brother Sykes triumphantly. "I don't believe he will," said Mrs. Sykes Flamstead; and she was right. The ten thousand pounds was well invested, and it remained there. The shop of Nicholas Flamstead was as full of watches, wheels,

and swinging pendulums as ever. Nobody could see that the ten thousand pounds made a hair's difference to the life, views, or prospects of Nicholas Flamstead.

But precisely at the moment when Nicholas seemed more wedded to his business than ever, he astonished the whole country. All at once, there was a rumour that he had disposed of his business to a London house and had disappeared. He had ridden over to Dainsby on the Sunday, and had taken a very kind leave of them, saying that he was going a longish journey. The nursemaid said that she had never seen Mr. Nicholas so fond of little Henry, nor kiss him so when he went away; and what astonished them all no little, when the boy came to be undressed there was found a most beautiful gold watch with a gold chain in his pocket, inscribed within the case, "To Henry Flamstead, as a remembrance from his uncle Nicholas." The watch was declared soon afterwards by a maker to be worth a hundred guineas. Scarcely was the report of the disposal of his business abroad, which was found by the family to be true, than a hundred other obscure and contradictory reports flew about. One said, "Ay, Mr. Nicholas was a shrewd fellow. He was too wise, with ten thousand pounds, to stick all his life to a watch-maker's shop; he would see the world, and did not want the fuss of leave-taking." Another hinted that there was a lady in the affair: that his visits to London had been much more frequent than usual, and his stay there a fortnight at a time, which might be true enough when he was about, from whatever cause, disposing of his concern. About a month afterwards a hat was found on the banks of Butterly Reservoir, a large sheet of water not many miles from Alfreton, and although it had evidently lain

long under water, or been drenched with rain, till it had lost too much of its shape, and all trace of name, of wearer or maker, there were not wanting those who declared that it somehow strangely reminded them of Nicholas Flamstead. This excited a great sensation. The Flamsteads made all the possible inquiries after the particulars of these matters, and after Nicholas in London. Nowhere, however, could anything be learned of his movements, excepting this important fact, that he had by a power of attorney lodged the ten thousand pounds in the hands of an eminent banking-house, with this strict and literal order, that the said sum of ten thousand pounds should remain in its present investment, and the proceeds of it be also invested by the said house according to the best of its judgment; and that the whole amount of capital and accumulated interest, or investment of that interest, should remain till further written order, or the return of the said owner. In case he did not return or send such order, the said sum should remain in the said hands till the period when he, the said owner, should have arrived at the natural age of eighty years, a reason for this being given that many of the owner's ancestors had lived to that age. Failing all order or return till that period, the whole accumulated sums should then be paid over to the owner's nephew, Henry Flamstead, if surviving, or to his children if dead, in equal shares. Failing issue on the part of the said Henry Flamstead, the sum should go to build at Alfreton, hospitals for poor clock and watchmakers of Derbyshire, with a stipulated weekly allowance.

The discovery of this singular fact gave a new and active stimulus to the inquiries on the part of the family of the missing clockmaker. A missing man

with ten thousand pounds is worth looking after. Every rumour, therefore, of men being found in this pond, and that river, was instantly attended to; every inquiry was made amongst his own acquaintances and connections in town and country, but he neither floated up out of any water nor any society. A few months after his disappearance there was a slight clue to something like a love-affair laid hold of in London, but nothing definite was made out. The lady was gone out to India with her family, and there was not one of their remaining friends that could make more of the rumour than a rumour. This clue, however, slight as it was, gave a direction to the inquiries of Nicholas's brother; and it was soon clearly ascertained that he had actually, within a week of his leaving Dainsby, embarked in the Indiaman, *Alicawn*, for the Cape of Good Hope. The result of inquiries at the Cape were not, however, very satisfactory. He had not gone to India with the *Alicawn*, yet no trace of him was to be found in the Cape Colony. For aught any one could tell, he might be gone off to locate himself with the Caffres or Hottentots, or to explore the interior. There was a shipping clerk who seemed to recollect such a gentleman at one time hovering about the harbour, and being particularly anxious in his inquiries after a certain ship expected from England on its voyage to India. But when further pressed to refresh his memory and add other particulars, they were so unlike anything belonging to Mr. Nicholas Flamstead that they only nullified his previous statements.

Here for a long time all intelligence stopped. That Nicholas had been at the Cape was certain, but how, or when, he went thence, was wrapped in impenetrable gloom. The matter seemed to have exhausted all

rational conjecture, and to sleep; when about two years afterwards, some one accidentally saw in an American paper the name of a Mr. Nic. Flamstead as that of a rising senator in one of the Western States. It turned out, however, to be, in reality, a Mr. Nicander Flemsted, a Dane. This incident, nevertheless, did not quench curiosity, it only turned into a particular field the eyes of the inquirers, and these now were not a few, for the mysterious disappearance of a man of so much substance was become almost a public topic. It was a most interesting riddle which various people found various good reason for desiring to solve. Colonial papers were eagerly explored, and it was not long before sanguine hopes were entertained that the retreat of the fugitive would be detected. There were seen some advertisements of some very large flocks of sheep, and an immense stock of wool, for sale in the district of Sidney, New South Wales, the property of a Mr. N. Flamstead. What so likely as that Nicholas should have shipped himself from the Cape for New Holland, and embarked in what appeared then the most promising of speculations—the growth of Australian wool. It was recollected that Nicholas as a boy had been much captivated by the relation of Colonial adventure; and that, moreover, he had been very fond of sheep; and bestowed much attention on them on the farm. Eager were the inquiries now sent out to Sidney, and in about twelve months more a very circumstantial account was received, that the Mr. N. Flamstead, in question, was a Mr. Noah Flamstead, a well-known and very wealthy citizen of Sidney, of at least seventy years of age, and having equally well-known correspondents in London, to whom the inquirers were referred. These repeated

disappointments now, indeed, did cool the ardour of search; the relations were reluctantly compelled to await the events of time, yet now scarcely more than half hoping that even this would clear up the singular fate of the Clockmaker. But their hopes were destined to receive a speedy revival. A clerk, at Lloyd's, turning over a file of Indian papers for a very different object, accidentally fell on the account of a duel which had been fought in the suburbs of the city of Bombay, and in which the name of Mr. Nicholas Flamstead occurred at full length as the challenger. It was stated that the quarrel had arisen from a very singular and deeply interesting love-affair. The two opponents had been both zealous candidates for the hand of a young and lovely lady of good family, and of singular beauty and accomplishments, as well as of most fascinating disposition; that, as is often the case, the one suitor had the favour of the lady, the other that of her family; the intimacy had commenced in England; the family had suddenly embarked for India, the father having received a high official appointment, and the two rivals, it would seem, had immediately followed. One, indeed, was supposed to have preceded the lady and her family. The date of these transactions was precisely that of the disappearance of Nicholas Flamstead; and the duel had taken place within a month of the arrival of the parties. Nicholas Flamstead was actually the challenger; his opponent was seriously but not mortally wounded. But that which gave the most singular and melancholy interest to this case was, that within six hours of the taking place of this *rencontre*, the lady, on whose account it had arisen, died of a rapid and malignant

disease of the country, apparently that which is now known by the name of the cholera.

These remarkable facts were immediately communicated to Mr. Sykes Flamstead, who hastened up to London and put in train, through a high official channel, the most efficient measures for ascertaining the identity of Mr. Nicholas Flamstead, the Clockmaker, with the Mr. Nicholas Flamstead of the duel. Such were the collateral facts of the case that there appeared very little doubt that these were one and the same man. The impatience with which the return of the Indian Mail was expected, may be imagined. It came—the gentleman had been readily found—the facts were all correctly stated; but the Mr. Nicholas Flamstead of the duel did not in any single particular correspond with that sent of the missing gentleman. Mr. Nicholas Flamstead, the Clockmaker, was described as a person of full form, five feet eight in height, of most decidedly formed features, a fair and ruddy complexion, with light-brown hair, and gray eyes. The Mr. Nicholas Flamstead of the duel was a tall, thin man, of a dark, sallow complexion, black shining hair, of a longish and saturnine countenance. He was a merchant of extensive affairs—and was not related, nor had, indeed, heard of the Flamsteads of Dainsby.

From this time nothing further was heard of the Clockmaker. Not a rumour arose; not an inquiry was instituted; all conjecture seemed completely at fault, and a silence and oblivion fell over the actual fate of Nicholas Flamstead as profound as death itself. As years went on, the conviction that he could not possibly be in existence grew almost to certainty: there never came to the trustees of his property the slightest intimation from him or of his

existence. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty years rolled over, and it was the same. Most of the banking firm into whose hands the Clockmaker had committed his money, had successively departed this life; yet the property itself was as regularly attended to by their sons and successors as it had been by themselves. There wanted now but fifteen years till the time of the trust should expire, and the whole now swollen mass should devolve to the nephew of the vanished, and, pretty certainly defunct, Clockmaker. And what a sum it was! So well had the banking-house fulfilled its important trust; so well had it exercised the discretionary power vested in it, that the ten thousand pounds was not now become forty thousand, as in the regular course of accumulation, but by purchase into certain companies for public accommodation in the metropolis, and in particular into a certain water-company, that it had reached the actual sum of eighty thousand pounds! We may imagine the intense interest which every year added to the expectancy of this remarkable honey-fall. What speculations were there in many fanciful heads! Should the old man now actually appear! Should some claimant, one of these days, arrive with the written order or the will of the Clockmaker; some young Flamstead out of the back-settlements of some distant colony, and swoop upon and bear away the stupendous prize just as it seemed about to fall into the hands of the long-expectant party. The very thought was enough to drive a nervous man mad; nor were there wanting those good-natured people who took care to suggest these fever-fraught ideas to Mr. Henry Flamstead and his family. "It is really now, a long time, to be sure," they would say; "and as to all earthly probability one might call it a

settled thing—but, as the old proverb has it, 'There is many a slip between the cup and the lip.'"

The Flamstead family, however, had at this time other goads of the world to sting and torture their feelings; and it is now our duty to turn back and follow out another series of events.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW FORTUNES OF THE FLAMSTEADS.

During the period we have referred to in endeavouring to unearth the Clockmaker in his sudden burrowing down out of the cognizance of mankind, if he had not, indeed, become earthed for ever, the little nephew Henry had shot up into manhood. He bore, however, a very different aspect, stamp and spirit, to those of the old race of Flamsteads. *They* were sturdy, hardy, plodding yeomen; Henry was tall and delicate in frame and aspect; they had adhered remarkably to the homely and somewhat sordid way of living and thinking of their ancestors. Henry had the mind and bearing, the feelings and ideas of a gentleman, and that too of a sensitive and refined one. As a boy he was always more fond of his mother's society than his father's. He cared little for looking after the cattle, and the sheep; after the men in the farm and at plough, as his father had done and wished him to do. He preferred riding his pony, and reading a book, or listening to the stories that his mother was accustomed to tell him. Nothing, however, delighted him so much as to accompany his mother in her walks and her visits.

His father used to say, "Why, Henry, you will never be good for anything; you are a regular

bantling. You are always hanging to your mother's apron-string, like her pincushion. Out upon you!—you will be quite nesh * and girlish; nay, you must surely be meant for a girl."

The old, rough farmers of the village said, "Ay, here 's a change! This is no chip of the old block. The Flamstead blood has run out—the Chetwynd blood (that of his mother's family) has got the uppermost, and master Henry will be none o' your clod-hoppers, but a thorough fine-fingered gentleman!"

There was a good deal of truth in the observations of both father and neighbours. Henry did really take extremely after his mother; and his affection for her was not greater than the influence of her tastes and feelings were all-powerful over him. She was a shrewd and, in many ways, a worldly-wise woman; but she was at the same time a very clever and lady-like one. She had higher tastes and accomplishments than had usually been the case with the Flamsteads' wives. She had moved in a much more refined circle. She had no child but Henry, and thus he became son and daugher, and everything to her. She had read a good deal, had a deal of imagination, and found in Henry a most willing listener to what there was no one besides at home who understood or appreciated in her. She inoculated Henry with her love of music and singing, as well as delighted him with her gifts in these respects; and thus, perhaps, still more softened his character, already too soft for his position.

As he grew up he was sent, through her influence, which was great over her husband, to a far higher school than any one of his ancestors had gone to—to one, indeed, where he found the sons of almost all

* Tender.

the gentry of his native county of his own age; and this again not only refined his manners, but gave a more confirmed bias to his delicacy of taste. The robuster habits of the more robust and more practical portion of the boys he instinctively turned from. His growth, from his fifteenth to his twentieth year, was so rapid that the most serious fears of consumption were entertained; and as he was the only child, these fears were proportionably stronger. He was, therefore, not once required by his father to devote his attention to the business of the estate, but with a servant and a due allowance was sent to travel in different parts of the kingdom, or was accompanied by his parents every summer to the sea-coast.

In his twentieth year he was a tall, slim youth, of a very delicate and yet somewhat rosy complexion; yet this rose-hue was so soft and fugitive that the paleness of languor might often be seen usurping its place. He was of a very mild, quiet, and gentle manner; and, no doubt from his sense of his frail hold of life, was of a decidedly religious turn of mind. At this age his father met with his death in a singular manner. He was out following the hounds of old Mr. Lowe, of Locko. They were crossing the moors at Horristan, when, coming in the heat of the pursuit to a sudden descent, which was covered with a glazing of ice, his horse fell, and he was precipitated with his head against a mass of stone that lay on the moor, and was taken up dead. His mother was so shocked at the news that she was seized with spasms of the chest; which, though conquered apparently at the time, yet recurred again and again at different intervals with such violence, that the medical man apprehended their approach to the region of the heart; that she would probably one

day expire suddenly. This, in fact, took place, as she sate after dinner in a particularly gay humour. The housekeeper had come in with some story of a ludicrous nature, which had just occurred in the village, at which she was so much amused that she laughed heartily, and in the midst of her mirth, laying her hand suddenly on her heart, said painfully "Oh, Heavens!" and expired in her chair.

The Flamsteads had usually been a tolerably long-lived family, and there had most frequently been seen here an old grandfather occupying the easy-chair, when the children of the son in his prime were playing around it. But here, now, was the sole descendant of the race, left suddenly alone in his house at the age of twenty-one, and that with so frail an apparent hold on life, that it well might create fears of the endurance of the line. There was also reason in the state and habits of Henry Flamstead for the wondering of the neighbours how it would be with the management of the estate. "Mr. Henry," said they, "is no farmer; he is no man of business; he will probably let the property and go and live somewhere else."

But Henry Flamstead had more strength of character than of constitution; he did not pretend to be his own farmer, had no great taste for it, nor faith in his own skill; but he selected a superior working man, and made him his farmer and bailiff, and found it answer extremely well. He rode over his lands every day, and conversed with this man on all the agricultural matters. He shot, and fished, and coursed with great enjoyment. Everybody was surprised to see that not only did his affairs go on well, but that he evidently improved in health and spirits. But he was a solitary man here; his tastes differed

much from those of his neighbours. He was always kind and affable with them, but he wanted other society, and this he used to seek very much among his mother's relatives in Derby, and the following spring he suddenly surprised the whole of Dainsby by bringing home, as his wife, a fair lady, one of his own cousins. This lady, who was as near as possible of his own age, was a lively, sunny-looking woman, who seemed to have no other object of admiration or of ambition but her husband. She was a fair, blue-eyed, happy-looking creature, that made a sunshine in the house, and, indeed, soon throughout the whole village. Many said that Mr. Henry, who was a man that might have picked and chosen anywhere amongst the ladies of the county, had not shown much wordly wisdom by selecting his pretty cousin who had no fortune; but those who saw Mrs. Flamstead with the eyes of true discernment, saw that she was one of the pearls of great price that Solomon speaks of. Perhaps she was a little too much like her husband in tone of mind, a little too gentle and soft; perhaps some one of more energy and will had been better; but it might be that a change after all would not have been more blessed in its results. Henry had brought genuine sunshine—heart and soul sunshine into his house which filled and irradiated every room of it with a feeling of love and peace; and instead of that he might have had, as was said, more energy and will in the shape of a —tempest.

As it was, time rolled on blissfully. Henry Flamstead saw almost every year a fresh chubby cherub on his hearth. There grew up in this beautiful sunshine a sound of laughter, a hum as of bees, a singing as of larks and throstles, and if we could but

have looked into the breakfast-room of Dainsby Old Hall some fine May morning, we should have seen one of the most delightful scenes of mortal happiness that the rolling earth could show us. There sat the lively, sunny mother on one side of the table; there, on the other, the happy and gay father, and all round on either hand such a troop of sunny, rosy, chatting children, as might well make the parents look so bright and benignant, and feel that heaven really did begin on earth. There you would have probably seen the windows open, and have perceived from the sunny garden the odorous breath of flowers come stealing in warm as if mixed with sunbeams, and the chirp of sparrows, and the sonorous cawing of rooks in the lofty new-leaved elms, till Dainsby Old Hall was not full of life and joy within only, but without also. Oh! how much do the evidences of life and gladness go together! Can the bird sing, and the flowers breathe forth sweetness, and the very rooks caw with lustiness and joy around the dwellings of care and of guilt? We can scarcely believe it—we can scarcely acknowledge the probability of such a thing. If it exists, one's ears and hearts are deaf to it; but when the music of existence rings joyously from the hearth-stone how its reverberations seem to waken accordant tones in the open air, and heaven and earth, sky and water, seem to sing together.

But could we look again into this old breakfast parlour, we should perceive a solemn hush. There is an air of gravity on those beaming, childish faces; the father utters the expressive words of thankfulness and blessing to which the very ancestors on the walls seem to listen, and then again all is eager merriment. There are white dresses and girlish figures clustering around the mother as she goes down the

long, old walks, and beside those green walls of clipped box, and arrows and balls are flying up in the blue air from boyish hands; there are ponies mounted, and away with the father over field and hill; or sober voices are calling to sober hours of study. So flew on many days and many years—how different to the days of old at Dainsby.

But there was a still greater change in the life and spirit of things there. Henry Flamstead had retained all the religious feeling of his early youth, but he had in some degree forsaken the religion of his ancestors. The Vicar of Dainsby was also the Vicar of Brexdell, a place at some distance. He was an old bachelor and a sordid one. Once a week he came and performed Divine service in the church, and that was all that his parishioners saw of him. This created great discontent. It was what had never occurred before. The living of Dainsby was quite sufficient for the maintenance of a minister, and the parsimony of its incumbent would not afford it a curate. The people petitioned the vicar zealously for a resident curate, and Mr. Henry Flamstead took the lead. It was in vain; and what was more, it only angered the vicar. The methodists now becoming strong, numerous, and active, soon saw the vacant field and stepped into it. At first they preached in the open air; no one invited them under a roof, and only the poor stood and heard them. But soon this gathering of the poor increased. They praised the new preachers—they compared them with their own vicar. The contrast provoked remarks amongst the farmers; the discontent grew, and first one and then another went out to hear. Suddenly there was an event which made a sensation through the whole place. Farmer Westbrook had

offered the methodists his barn, and invited the preachers to make his house their place of call. A revolution was now begun—a strife, a convulsion, that had pretty much in the same manner gone through almost every parish in England. It was a real civil war between church and schism; between old things and opinions, and the new. The poor almost with one voice and spirit crowded to the new banner of devotion; the farmers were arrayed in opposite ranks. Some even who had been loudest against the vicar now became silent for a time, and then as loud on the other side. They were wroth with the pastor, but they were loyal to the church. Amongst these was Henry Flamstead. Much as he was disgusted with the vicar, he had never anticipated any change like this. His friends, educational and ancestral opinions and prejudices, leaned all the other way; but, at the same time, he was too liberal and enlightened to prefer utter neglect of the people, only too common then in country places, to zeal and attention to them. He stood, therefore, long zealously aloof from this new movement. He watched it, and heard what was said for and against it. But at length when he heard, particularly in more genteel circles, and by those who had previously taken no pains to judge for themselves, the most absurd and false stories of the methodist proceedings, his just and generous feelings impelled him to explain, to rectify, and justify. As he still watched the effects of the new proceedings, and saw order, industry, sobriety, and intelligence taking place of ignorance and demoralization, he said, "there can be no mistake here—there is no doubt which of these two things to choose—there can be no question whether we shall have zealous pastors or careless ones—an earnest, con-

tented, and reformed people or sottish ignorance, and the ale-house flourishing more than the house of worship;" and the people of Dainsby were soon after treated to a new surprise in seeing Mr. Henry Flamstead and his family walk into the barn, and seat themselves just before the preacher.

From that day their attendance was regular, and within three months the most substantial leaders of the methodist congregation were invited one evening to meet Mr. Flamstead at the Hall, and were transported with the communication of the fact, that it was his wish to present them with a piece of ground upon which to build a chapel, and two hundred and fifty pounds towards its erection. We can well imagine the sensation which this news, like a flash of lightning, shot through the parish. We need not add more than that within a year a handsome chapel stood complete in the midst of Dainsby, and that the family pew of the Flamsteads stood empty in the church, whilst a neat one near the pulpit of the chapel was duly seen filled with the squire's family.

The consequent revolution which this circumstance occasioned in the life and connections of Mr. Flamstead it requires no great stretch of imagination to perceive. In the country at large he was a shunned and marked man. He was regarded as a traitor to the established church, as a silly enthusiast, as a weak fanatic, as a vain, ambitious man, who preferred to be at the head of a party, to being the quiet, stanch, respectable pillar of a great national fabric. All these charges and assertions he had calculated upon, and knew how to bear. He was flung for society very much upon the people of his own parish, and on a class in worldly rank far inferior to what he had been accustomed to mingle with. On

the other hand he found himself actively occupied and bound up with a new class of interests He was placed actually at the head of a new religious movement in his own neighbourhood. His example gave a fresh *eclat* and life to the cause. Most of what he believed to be of eternal importance he now saw depending essentially upon himself. He came into contact and correspondence with the active movers of a new and great system ; linked up, even in this secluded corner, with the vital action of the whole world. The missions of his own people, and the intelligence which came, both through ever-arriving new preachers, and the "Methodist Magazine," opened up a world, vast and incalculable in its influences on mankind, that gave a new impulse and value to existence.

Time ran on—Henry Flamstead, by the active duties that had devolved on him, by having to act and think for others, was, as every one saw, become a much more practical, busy, managing character than he was before. He not only thought and worked for the society, but he thought and worked for his family. He had, in a few years after his joining the Methodist body, no fewer than five children around his table, and every prospect of a steady increase of the number; this was another new feature of the Flamstead family, and he could not, like his forefathers, look with a sloth-like indifference to the future fortunes of his children. Circumstances not only infused new spirit into him, but into the times. The great war of French aggression was raging all over Europe. Napoleon, like a new incarnation of the ancient spirit of universal domination, with the terrific powers of more truly scientific than civilized Europe to work with, was overrunning the nations, and making the proudest monarchs stoop like slaves

The price of all agricultural produce in still free and active England rose to a pitch that made men regard land as so much gold that only wanted shovelling up. It was greedily bought up on all sides. The higher it rose in consequent value the greater became the mania of its acquisition. Mr. Flamstead was not exempt from this contagion. He found his corn such a mine of wealth that he naturally looked out for still more land, not only as an investment for surplus capital, but as a source of such brilliant returns. He bought extensively; and from year to year as his taste for purchase was universally perceived, more and more was offered to him by shrewd and differently calculating men, at prices, which however exorbitant did not then appear so.

By the time that some of his elder children were assuming the forms of men and women, Henry Flamstead found himself in possession of five times the extent of the earth's surface that had ever acknowledged the ownership of his family.

If we were now to take another peep at Dainsby Old Hall and the Flamstead family, we should find it as bright and charming a scene of human happiness as the green vales of England could present to us, in all their woody mazes, or on all their sunny slopes. There were nine young Flamsteads gathered around their parents. The eldest of these was a daughter, a gentle creature much resembling her father in person and character, bearing the name of Elizabeth in the baptismal record, but known in the family only by that of Betsy. The next was a son, George, an active, light-hearted, vigorous youth, in whom his father delighted to find wondrous resemblance to his uncle, the Clockmaker; and the third was another daughter, a shorter and merrier creature than her

sister —a maiden with all the sunny form and bright-heartedness of her mother—the little, domestic Anne. Nobody, however, would picture her by that word—she was the good and blithe Nancy. As these young people will have presently to figure in this family story, we give this brief sketch of their personalities, and leave the younger herd at present to their games and their sunshine.

Within and without Dainsby Old Hall had now an air of prosperous joy. Its walls, roof, windows, and wood-work were in the most bright and perfect order. New stables and out-buildings had been added, and the whole, instead of staring across the lawn, had been planted off by a screen of young trees. Beyond these, if you penetrated, you soon found yourself in an extensive farm-yard, where all modern improvements, both in live stock and their habitations and accommodations, were the most conspicuous. The fine dairy, the stately bullocks at straw before the great open doors of the barn, where a thrashing machine was knocking out the corn at a rate that would have amazed the owner's grandfather; the shapely swine, the broods of poultry, peacocks, guinea-fowls, ducks, geese, turkeys, and hens—all testified to the reign of abundance. If it were winter, the tall oxen, as we have said, were feeding from cribs before the great barn-doors, or were luxuriously feeding on turnips and beet-root cut for them with new and rapid machines. If it were summer, what a scene of beauty was presented by the sleek and mottled herds, and the gay steeds grazing in the rich meadows before the house. To the house itself there ran a new carriage road, with a proud sweep through shrubbery and flower-bordered woodlands; and handsome carriages rolled lightly along it

conveying visitors from neighbouring families, for Mr. Henry Flamstead was too influential and prosperous a man to be entirely cut, even for his Methodism, especially with the princely sum into which the wealth of the Clockmaker was rolling itself for him and his children, in view. The family carriage itself was rich and well appointed, and truly did handsome and happy faces beam from it as it passed along. At times, too, a troop of young horsemen and horsewomen dashed out from its gates and away through the neighbouring country, or came hurrying in at the clamorous tone of the dinner bell.

Everything seemed to glide on at Dainsby Old Hall in a joyous, easy, full and flowing course; there was, in its truest sense, peace and plenty within its walls. "The rich man has many friends," and Mr. Henry Flamstead was rich. Around his table were frequently assembled the most cordial and radiant faces. From London, from many a part of the kingdom, came the ministers and agents, and the leading members of the religious body with which the family were united. Some of their highest pleasures were in their great religious meetings and gatherings in town and country, and in the presence of the great men of the connection.

The young people had no lack of associates of their own age, and to them, in this glad season of their existence, life indeed wore a sunlit face. George had finished his education, and one of his most intimate comrades at Repton school was also now a comparatively near neighbour, and an almost constant guest in the family. Robert Nadell was a solitary person in his own little hamlet of Millbrook, for he was the only child of a gentleman of good property there, and it was not to be wondered at that he was glad to get

away as often as possible into so cheerful and happy a scene as that which surrounded his old schoolfellow. They fished, rode, shot, coursed together; they worked industriously at the various mechanical labours of turning, joinering, and even wagon and plough-making, of which George was passionately fond He had actually engaged a skilful wheelwright and farming-implement maker, and was daily to be found busily employed in the shop, working away with mallet and chisel as admirably as any apprentice in the trade. Nay, he came eventually to pride himself on being able, if need were, to turn out as good a plough, pair of harrows, winnowing machine, or wagon, and paint them, too, and then use them, as any man in England. Here again his father saw the mechanical turn of his uncle Nicholas, and would often say, "What would he not give that the Clock-maker could see George at his labours."

We must not, however, pretend that the young Robert Nadell was so much enamoured of wagon and cart-making as of other objects at the Hall. My young readers would justly smile at my want of observation if I did not at once tell them that I have long been aware, from the moment that he appeared upon the scene, that there were other attractions at Dainsby Old Hall, which drew him thither so continually. Nay, I will at once confess that George Flamstead would often come running into the house, with a loud cry of "Robert! Robert! where in the world is that fellow gone to now again? What, cutting papers? when I want you to strike with the great hammer! Come along, the wheel is ready to be tired, and here you are!"

Robert, in fact, soon became the declared and the accepted lover of Miss Flamstead, and as George and

he had long seemed more like brothers than friends, Robert seemed now to become really the brother of the whole young group, and one of the family. There was scarcely a day that he was not there, and in all their rides and walks, their amusements, and their serious and religious occupations and engagements, he was seen taking part. Time rolled on gallantly at Dainsby Old Hall; it was, indeed, one of the most perfect of earth's paradises. Youth, rejoicing in innocence and love, and the daily course of life filled up with duties that gave peace to the heart, and bound it up in sympathy with the interests of men.

CHAPTER VII.

A CLOUD ON THE SUNSHINE.

Unstable and precarious as is human prosperity, that of the Flamsteads appeared to most eyes as likely to endure as that of any mortal lot whatever. There was so much property, so much virtue, so much domestic affection, as well as apparent health. Yet the Flamsteads were not exempt from their quota of enemies and croakers; there were those who were fond of comparing Henry with his ancestors, and commenting on the difference. The simple old folks, how homely, how careful, how plodding they had been. There was a pretty change here. This Mr. Henry Flamstead, why, he was quite a fine delicate gentleman—his own fathers would not have known him. They used to trudge about over their fields, and after their ploughmen. He went jaunting on a fine horse—they used to stop a gap or dig a post-hole, if necessary, with their own hands; he would not soil his fingers with his native earth, but

went about with gloves on his hands, as if it were always winter. They went to attend at all fairs and markets, and made all their bargains about corn and cattle themselves; he kept a bailiff to do all that. They were contented to drive a gig—and Mr. Henry's father had only an open carriage—here now was an open carriage, a close carriage, and a pony carriage. They used to keep little company, and old-fashioned hours, and spread old-fashioned fare on their table—here, who could tell out of what regions all the folks, gentle and simple, came. From the *four* winds, nay, from forty winds, did they seem to blow together. Gentry, preachers—heaven could tell who or what they were, but never was there a week, and often not a day, but somebody was posting up to the Hall. Well, well! it used to be said that "a penny saved is a penny got," and that "many birds picking at the barn-door would soon bring ninepence to a groat;" but here, if people could believe their eyes, all the old maxims were proved to be nonsense, for the more there was spent, the more there was left behind. "Time would show," added they, however, with a sort of self-consolatory reflection and a knowing nod.

Others, again, when it was remarked what a vast quantity of land Mr. Flamstead had bought, asked if they knew as certainly that it was all paid for; or if paid for to the seller, as was generally said to be the case, whether there might not be heavy mortgages lying on it. If the old Flamsteads had not laid up an unknown hoard, this must be the case. Many inquiries were made on this head, and yet nothing could be discovered. Joy and plenty sat on the towers of Dainsby Old Hall and the curious wondered, and the pious saw it as the blessing of God.

The mystery, however, which the simple people

of Dainsby could not clear up, I can, and now will. There *were* heavy mortgages on the newly-purchased lands. Mr. Henry Flamstead was but one amongst a most extensive class, who saw, in the high value given to landed produce by the war, a means offered, and which once gone could never recur, of making a great increase to their estates. The extra proceeds of their estates, at a moderate calculation, would, in twenty years at least, double them. The firm elevation, the extensive conquests, the active arrangements of Napoleon, coupled with his unparalleled military genius, seemed to their imaginations to present a prospect of the continuance of this state of things, when the determined resistance of Great Britain was taken into the account, to which no man could set a precise termination. Under this impression, as I have said, great and numerous purchases were made, and money taken up upon them, which was to be annually paid off by instalments, and the most confident certainty was entertained that ten or more years, according to the amount of produce, would see all debt cleared off, and the family prosperity thus magnificently augmented.

Unfortunately for numbers of these sanguine speculators, Providence had set a nearer bound to the bloody course of Napoleon than the shrewdest politician could prognosticate; the soaring spirit of presumption, puffed up by unparalleled success, was to find, not from the hand of man, but from the right arm of the Almighty, wrapped in the tempests and the frozen terrors of the north, its first and effectual check. At the sublime signal of Heaven, the nations rose in countless legions; the Cossacks, and the very Tartars, came sweeping down from the wall of China; and, like the locusts from the East, covered

the face of the earth, and chased the discomfited Emperor to his own imperial city, and into the victorious power of England. At once peace returned; all Europe felt a sudden revulsion, as from the excitement of delirium to the stupor of temporary inanition. All the towering schemes and prices incident on this great and unnatural war toppled down, and buried such speculators as Henry Flamstead by thousands in their ruins. Before the artificial breakwater of the corn bill could be cast up against the refluent tide of prices and circumstances, the ruin of numbers was complete. The fall in the price of land was so great, that in many instances that which was bought was not only lost, but it swallowed up that which the possessor had before. How many families can yet testify with sorrow, and from the depths of irremediable poverty, to these facts.

Mr. Flamstead's purchases, extensive as they were, did not, however, necessarily involve anything like ruin. Had he had no expectations, he must have been compelled to let all his possessions go, and to have encumbered his original estate considerably to have discharged the still surplus debt upon it, but then there was the rapidly accumulating property of the Clockmaker, which, from that time, in twenty years, must, if no claimant from the vanished owner appeared, which now seemed totally improbable, fall in and discharge everything, and leave also a handsome addition to his wealth. This he was able to shew to his creditors, and so reasonable did it appear, that they were for the most part ready to leave their mortgages as they were, in reliance on a statement which he laid before them, by which it appeared that by a system of rigid economy, and by other plans, he could, in the meantime, manage to defray the annual

interest. It was evident, indeed, that a most radical change must take place in the whole mode of life, views, and occupations of the Flamstead family. The carriage must be laid down; all unnecessary horses be disposed of; a simple and strict plan of housekeeping must be adopted, and strictly adhered to; and that liberal hospitality which had made Dainsby Old Hall the genial and happy resort of so many, must receive a check as frosty and repugnant to the dispositions of the owners, as that of the frosts and snows of Russia had been to Napoleon. All these things, however, under a sense of duty, and an animating hope that success would eventually crown their exertions, sanctify their sacrifices, and make all in the end well, were most cheerfully borne by every member of the family; and this, and the sound unity and strong affection of the whole kindred group, made them treat with indifference the outward coldness which always follows the overclouding of the sun of fortune, and the ill-natured sneers which the envious shot about like burning arrows at the bared heads that were left exposed by evil chance to their assaults.

There was a shadow, a gloom, but not a darkness; a hush, but not a horror, fallen on Dainsby Old Hall, and well would it have been if this state of things had remained; but it is rare when so great a shaking comes on a house if it do not continue to crack, its foundations to give way, and its walls to open wider chasms, threatening even total ruin. It was soon found to be the case here, and as is usually the fact, the further mischief came from a quarter where there was the least apparent adverse momentum.

Amongst the creditors of Mr. Henry Flamstead, there were two from whom he had borrowed a joint sum on his note of five hundred pounds. The sum

was so small, that it was not deemed of sufficient importance to secure it by mortgage. It was, indeed, such a sum as Mr. Flamstead held himself qualified to pay off at any short notice, and had taken it on that condition. The owners of this sum were two men who were closely connected by marriage, they had in fact married two sisters, and they were as closely connected in trade. They were from the neighbouring town of Belper; the one a frame-smith, the other a sinker-maker. These terms are probably sufficiently obscure to the general reader to require some explanation, as they are of local existence. The frame-smith is the smith who makes the stocking-loom or frame, as it is called where it is mostly used, in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Leicestershire. The sinker-maker is the maker of the sinkers or strips of iron belonging to the machinery of the frame, and which derive their name from sinking down upon the woof and pressing it into its proper place. So little is known even of the existence of such a trade in other parts of the country, that some years ago a Conservative paper in Liverpool, describing some radical political procession at Nottingham, which it did in sufficiently depreciatory terms, added, "And there were sinker-makers, too, a kind of fellows whose business we do not understand, but which the very name indicates to be among the lowest of the low."

Now though the business of a sinker-maker has nothing necessarily in it to cause its practisers to be the "lowest of the low," yet it so happened that the sinker-maker who was a joint proprietor of this five hundred pounds might without any outrage on justice have been classed in that category. His name was Ned Stocks, and that of his friend and brother-in-law, the framesmith, Peter Snape. Ned Stocks and Peter

Snape were so much of a genus, and so much impressed by the same operating causes with the like qualities and character, that there could be no need under any circumstances to attempt a distinction between them. They were, in fact, in almost every particular, inseparable. They were of the same or of nearly the same age, about fifty; they had a considerable personal resemblance, and were so everlastingly together that they had often been taken for twins. They did not indeed live in one house, but they lived in two close adjoining ones, and their shops lay behind their houses, and were only divided by the road into their gardens, which gardens again were only separated by a common walk. They were men who had gone on from youth hammering and filing away amid heaps of iron and smithy-slag, and never were clean except on a Sunday, or when they went out on business, when they washed their hands and faces, leaving there a clearly defined boundary line of the old accumulation of smoke and iron-smut under their hair, ears, and in the hollows of their eyes. Nay, their whole skins were saturated with smut, so that it gave them what might truly be called dark complexions; and the same sombre sadness was incorporated into what they put on as their best or worky-day garments.

Good workmen were Ned and Peter, but that was the only point in which *good* could be applied to them. They were, in truth, two of the most thoroughbred grubs that ever crawled on the earth. Nay, the term grub does not suit them; it has something soft about it, and Ned Stocks and Peter Snape had nothing soft, not even their flesh. That was made, as it were, of iron wire, and their hearts might be supposed to be compounded of iron weights; they were

hard, hard, hard, from top to toe, from skin to centre, as their own bars of steel. They were harder, for they could shape and weld the bars—the bars, it might be believed, could never make any impression on them, not even to break their heads, for these seemed like Goliath's, as described by Thomas Ellwood;

"Upon his head a pot of brass he wore."

Their very ideas were hard and metallic, and moved in straight lines, like steam-engines on iron roads, but not so fast. They had grubbed on for nearly thirty years together in their trade, and had no living sentiment but to make money and put it out to interest. So gross and overpowering was this feeling, that it had, in reality, certainly cramped and contracted the way of their own fortune, for they scraped together every penny they could to put it out, and left themselves only just enough to keep their trade going in a very small way; and they took long credit for themselves that they might have the cash which ought to have paid their debts, out at interest.

Such were the two hopeful creditors of Henry Flamstead, who, when every enlightened man was satisfied with his statement, remained dissatisfied. They had taken alarm; the country was in a state of alarm; there were every day the most awful details in the newspapers of bankruptcies, and sales of estates for debt, and they had but one idea of safety —that was to see with their own eyes, and handle with their own hands—their money.

Accordingly it was not many days after Mr. Henry Flamstead had requested a private interview with his creditors, and of Ned and Peter among them, when those two worthies again appeared at the Hall, and said that they had taken second thoughts, and they

would prefer having the money. The truth was, this had been their first and their only thought, but they had not dared to utter it in the presence of so many great and respectable gentlemen, for these sordid reptiles, though the very thunder of heaven would not be able to turn them out of their own ignorant and obstinate track, had yet a slavish fear of intelligent and higher minds; or they had feared that had they expressed any dissatisfaction, that feeling might have spread, all might become as jealous as they were, that some one might be helped before them, and then there would be a scramble, and in the scramble a rending, and they might all come in only for a fragment. True, therefore, to the selfish instinct they went away in silence, and now returned in silence, and would be glad to have their money.

Mr. Flamstead told them that if they insisted upon it, they should have it; but as they knew the state of the money market, they were aware that he could not at once command even that sum, except on most extravagant conditions, and conditions therefore evidently detrimental to the securities on the estate of the other parties. They must therefore wait till the time required by their note—six months after notice.

As ignorant of all forms of business as they were greedy, they said—"Nay, but they must have it at once. The circumstances," said they, "made them uneasy, and justified their demanding it at once." Mr. Flamstead steadily resisted this—he had in fact no means of doing otherwise, but offered, if they were at all anxious as to the nature of the security, to give them a mortgage on lands probably clear.

This, however, did not at all meet their views. They declared that they did not pretend to know what was clear and what was not; they only knew

that a deal of money was owing on the estate, and for ought they knew, more than it was worth. They seemed to catch additional alarm at the offer of a mortgage, as if it were only another means of binding them fast to the estate and the general case. They feared in their own minds that every man, like them, was only pretending on the day of meeting to be satisfied, in order secretly to pounce on the property and be served before the rest; they had therefore but one cuckoo note—"We mun ha' our money!"

Mr. Flamstead saw himself suddenly placed by these stupid and pig-headed fellows in a very delicate situation. If he made an effort and paid off these men, it would be trumpeted abroad, and the consequences, in the feverish state of the times, might be a general panic amongst his more heavily implicated creditors, and bankruptcy and total ruin be the result. If he refused them there was equal danger to be apprehended from their clamorous discontent. He therefore took a middle course, and proceeded to consult his attorney, and be advised by him whether to pay at an early day, or at the end of the six months. But it was easier, difficult as that was, to make up his own mind, than to get rid of these two leeches. They still sat doggedly in their chairs, saying that they would not go without their money. They remained there hours, spite of Mr. Flamstead telling them that he had not that sum of money in the house, and that he could not make money, and that it was therefore impossible that they could then and there receive it. On this Peter Snape gave a ghastly smile, and attempted the perpetration of a witticism.

"One would ha' thought," said he, "that yo could ha' made munny welly a while ago, yo seemed to

swell out into such grander. Yo did it rarely; and now it comes t' th' pinch, yo canna pay a poor body a poor five hundred. Well, well, we mun see what's to be done."

With this they slowly withdrew, looking round them when they reached the lawn, as if they were actually afraid that not only Mr. Flamstead, but Dainsby Old Hall, might run away as soon as their backs were turned.

Dreadful was the night which Henry Flamstead did not sleep, but toss through, after the departure of these iron-souled fellows. He saw in perspective the degradations and difficulties which he might possibly have to go through. To be thus cramped and tortured for five hundred pounds! Why, the very minerals under his estate were worth twenty thousand. He arose early and rode off to his attorney. His advice was to soothe the men. He knew them well, he said, and could assure him that not all the eloquence of Chatham would have the slightest power of persuasion to delay them. They were banded together like night and darkness—like death and sin; their only feeling or conception was, that they wanted their money, and they would have it. He advised, therefore, to write to them and say that at the earliest possible day they should be paid off.

It is difficult to say what advice in this case would have been the best. Nothing but paying the money could remove the difficulty, and under the circumstances of the general lack of confidence in the country, that was a greater difficulty than all. The letter which, on his own suggestion, the attorney wrote, was, however, most disastrous. The two ravenous men appeared again the very next day at the Hall; that, in their mind, was the earliest pos-

sible day, and they were as doggedly insolent, and importunate, and immoveable, as before. They took no notice of Mr. Flamstead's explanations, that the earliest possible day, in a case and in times like this, might be considered in a few weeks or a month. At that they only looked at one another, and then said, "It does na' sinnify, Mester Flamstead, we mun ha' our munny. Yo seem to ha' famous things here," looking around the room, "why dunna yo ca' a sale, and sell some on 'em and pay yo'r way?"

Henry Flamstead could not, wrung as his heart was, resist a smile at this, and he quietly observed, that it was not quite so bad as that yet. He had to endure their presence and their low drawling insolence for five mortal hours. To turn them out was, he knew, not be ventured on, unless the cash was ready to pay down the next day. So here he sat, begging them to take his word, and to withdraw for the present, as he had family matters to attend to.

"Take his word! how were they to take his word?" they asked; "had they not taken him at his word, and come there on his promise to pay them at the earliest possible day?"

They took the base opportunity when a servant came into the room on business, to raise their voices, and to say more loudly than ever, "We wanten our munny!—we mun ha' our munny!"

It was very difficult with Henry Flamstead to preserve his patience with these men—there was another person to who. it was more so—his son George, who, coming into the house while they were there, found his mother weeping, and his sisters, Betsy and Nancy, in a state of great excitement. To his questions as to the cause, the little impetuous Nancy gave answer in the most indignant terms, and

George catching the generous and contagious fire of his sister's zeal, over what she called "this shameful, this most detestable treatment of her father," declared, whilst all the blood in his body seemed to mount into his face, "That he would go in and pitch those two miserable old codgers to Jericho!"

Fortunately his father met him in the hall, and seeing his state of excitement, took him by the arm into another room, and told him that he felt and appreciated his affectionate sympathy, but he must now call upon him to show not only sympathy, but a wise prudence. One rash action, he represented to him, would now assuredly plunge them all into inconceivable difficulties and distress.

George at once declared that he saw it, and would restrain himself. He put such compulsion on himself, that he went in and told the men that his father had to attend to some unavoidable business, and was therefore obliged to leave them; he could not see them again that day, but that he was sure that his father's attorney would, in as little time as possible, arrange for the payment of the money. This intelligence Ned and Peter received with a simultaneous grunt, like two old wild boars. They departed without a word, but with significant glances at each other, and the next day brought a new personage on the scene.

This personage was Mr. Screw Pepper, an attorney of Derby. Mr. Screw Pepper was one of a very large class of attorneys. He was a man who had the reputation of being a desperate clever fellow, and as being pre-eminently a man of sharp practice. He had been the son of a hostler who was accustomed to bring up a gig from some livery stables, for a lawyer who regularly had it thence, and who, when the gig, as was often the case, had to wait long before the

lawyer's door, used to leave it in the care of his son, a great shock-headed lad, who soon attracted the lawyer's notice by the assiduousness of his attentions in holding the horse while he got in, and making the most profound bows for the two-pence that he often received. The lawyer soon afterwards wanting a boy to sweep out the office, and carry out messages, thought this the very lad for the purpose. In this post he displayed so much shrewdness that he eventually was put upon an office stool, and employed in copying voluminous documents. Here again his zeal and success were so great that his master saw in him the rough, hairy caterpillar, out of which a great hawk-moth of an attorney must certainly come; and looking forward to his own ease in future years, when such a shrewd, active, and, as he hoped, humbly obsequious partner would be most invaluable, he had him articled, and Screw Pepper rapidly became furbished up into a shabby-smart sort of a clerk, with clothes thread-bare, and almost bursting with his growing bulk, and with many jokes and insults to bear from the more genteel of his fellow clerks, but with a wonderful self-complacency, and an unbounded show of reverence for his master. He was accustomed on all occasions to hold up the said master as the most profound lawyer, and only held back by the jealous intrigues of the profession from being actually attorney-general. These praises were sure by some means to get to the ears of the said illustrious lawyer, and Mr. Screw Pepper stood in consequent favour with him. We need not pursue very minutely his office career. He went through the necessary years of clerkship with the greatest satisfaction to himself and employer, who was so proud of his discernment in the discovery of such an

acute and indefatigable legal genius that he advance the necessary means, and, after a short sojourn in London, Mr. Screw Pepper came down to his admiring friends a Master Extraordinary in Chancery, and was duly admitted as a partner in the firm of Lookout, Hook, and Pepper.

In this firm, however, Mr. Screw Pepper proved only too active and clever. He was far too clever for the united powers of observation and check of Messrs. Lookout and Hook, and these were by no means contemptible. He not only very soon dived into all the arcana of their practice and connections, but was found to be availing himself of them to his own exclusive benefit, in a manner that counselled as speedy a quittance of him as possible. On the abrupt dissolution of partnership which ensued great was the marvel and the curiosity. Lookout and Hook answered with grave and mysterious looks when spoken to on the subject, and strange stories to the disadvantage of Mr. Screw Pepper flew about. But Mr Screw Pepper looked anything but cast-down or mortified by the change. He was, on all occasions, lively, smiling, bustling, and displaying a happy imperturbability to all the foolish qualities of shame and despondence. He also answered, when spoken to on the subject, with mysterious but with almost merry looks; and as to those stories to his disadvantage, they as suddenly dropped, at least into the most confidential whispers, as they had arisen, for Mr. Screw Pepper was not a man to be trifled with.

The good people of Derby soon saw him take a house, and open offices, small it must be confessed, but, like himself, with a smart, aspiring air about them. He and a single clerk made up the whole professional force in these offices, and there was but

a scanty display of japanned-boxes, bookshelves, and parchment under operation; yet Mr. Screw Pepper was so constantly in active motion, now with large-folded papers tied with red tape in his hand, going to and fro in the town, and now setting off by the coach with a huge great coat on his arm, and a boy carrying his carpet-bag, that people said the fellow must really find something to do. There were, it is true, some of Lookout and Hook's clerks who declared with much merriment at their evening smoking companies, that their governors, Lookout and Hook, had set boys to follow Mr. Pepper, and that they had found that he was regularly in the practice of carrying these tape-tied papers about the town for hours every day; and that they had dodged him, after parading some of the main streets, through the most obscure alleys and yards, till he reappeared in other great streets, without calling at a single door. They protested, too, that his coach journeys, and sometimes equally bustling departures in gigs, were of equal importance. They had traced him to an inn on the Burton road, where he had got down, professing to wait for another coach going across to Hinckley; and on another occasion had seen him impatiently inquiring for the house of some great landed proprietor, some five miles off, to which he had ostensibly set out to walk, but had been traced only to a rabbit warren, where he had pulled out of his pocket a paper of sandwiches and a little bottle of brandy, had regaled himself, whistled a tune, and then strolled back again in time for the afternoon coach, to which he bustled up as if he had been detained by momentous business, till he had but just been able to save the conveyance.

These might, it is true, be envious inventions;

one thing is certain, that for some time only the lowest and most simple class of clients were seen entering or issuing from the office of Mr. Screw Pepper. But in awhile he began to have a certain character for being a man of sharp practice, which means, according to common and unprofessional ideas, a man that sticks at nothing, but will undertake any job, however foul, and drag it through by any means. The local court, called the Peveril Court, for the recovery of small debts, soon saw him an active practitioner. Any one who wanted to compel some poor wretch, who had not enough to find bread for his children, to pay some paltry debt, perhaps not even a just one, or to see him turned from his wretched home and flung into a more wretched one, the low, dilapidated, and squalid building called the prison of this court, went to Mr. Screw Pepper, and was sure to have his thirst of vengeance satisfied, and was sure to have to pay smartly for it himself. Let us take a case of this description which was in these same screwing hands. The debt was thirty shillings. The writ and other documents were served, not on the debtor, but on his attorney, another man of like fame and practice.

The plaintiff, after the lapse of some eight or ten months, entering the office of Mr. Pepper to inquire into the progress of this cause, was received by him with the most obstreperous bursts of merriment.

"What is the matter?" asked the plaintiff. "Oh, capital! capital!" cried Mr. Pepper; "a most famous, capital joke!"—"Joke! what joke?" asked again the plaintiff. "Why," replied Mr. Screw Pepper, still interrupted by fresh outbreaks of laughter, "we have sued the defendant, brought the cause to trial, won it, got a verdict, and then found that the defendant has

been dead and buried these six months! ha! ha! ha!" —"And do you think that a joke?"—"Oh, a capital joke, to sue, and get a verdict against a dead man! ha! ha! ha!—ha! ha! ha!"

The plaintiff, who began to feel that what was a joke to Mr. Screw Pepper, would be no joke to himself, upbraided Mr. Pepper for not taking better care to know whether the man were alive or not.

"Oh, I assure you, all is quite regular, quite regular. We served the documents on the defendant's attorney, and he always replied, 'All right! all right!'"—"But what effects had the man?"—"Oh, that is quite as full of fun. We got an execution against his goods, and sold up the widow, and have credited your account with the balance of the proceeds —one pound five shillings."

The plaintiff found, indeed, that it was no joke to him when Mr. Screw Pepper's bill appeared—it being exactly as many pounds as the sum sued for was shillings—namely—thirty.

But we are not to suppose that all Mr. Screw Pepper's exploits were of this costly kind to the client—costly they were, but so generally to the other unfortunate party, that he grew gradually into great request, even with persons of higher stand and pretensions. He was soon seen with a smart gig of his own, and a boy with a bit of yellow lace, or, as envious neighbours called it, bed-lace, round his hat, driving him, while a large blue-stuff bag was sure to be seen protruding out of the vehicle somewhere. He was a sedulous attender at the market on the farmers, as if he had much business amongst them. Here he was very jolly, jocose, smart, and talkative, and got the reputation of a prodigiously clever man, as sharp as a needle with two points. One instance of this

clever practice we may give, as it serves to show how he so rapidly ingratiated himself among the simple sons of the soil.

An old farmer, as Mr. Screw Pepper was talking with him in the corn-market, casting scowling looks at another not far off, observed, "Now, there 's a fellow that you 'd take by his looks to be as honest as the day, and yet let me tell you, there is not a greater scamp between here and London. That villain owes me forty pounds, and the wisest lawyer of you all cannot get it from him."—"Why not?" asked Mr. Screw Pepper, eyeing the man askance, "why not?"—"Why not?" replied the farmer, "because I have no evidence, that 's why not. I sold him a horse for the money. Says he, 'Let 's go in and take a pint of port on it.' In we goes, and then says he, 'I shall not pay you to-day, but this day next week at market.'—'Very well,' says I. But next market-day comes, and my gentleman says not a word about paying: so I ups to him, and jogging him on the elbow, says—'To-day—you recollect!'—'To-day? what of to-day?' says he, as innocent as a sucking pigeon; 'what of to-day?'—'Why, to-day you promised to pay for the horse!'—'Pay for the horse!' says he, as if all in astonishment; 'what?—why I paid you there and then!—did the wine get into your head so that you've forgotten that?' I was struck on my chest as if with a big stone. It knocked all the wind out of me, for I saw that the fellow meant gillery. Long and short—he stuck to it, and not a soul has been able t' extract a doit out of him."—"Phoh!" said Screw Pepper, "I 'll get it for you."—"I 'll tell thee what, man," said the old farmer, delighted; "if thou gets it, here 's a ten pound note for thee—that 's all I can say; but I think thou 'll find thy match there.

Many a clever fellow has had a try at him." Mr Screw Pepper disappeared, and, before the market was over, walking up to the old farmer, pulled out a roll of papers, and said, "Look at these—there 's the money for you, however!" — "Burn me!" exclaimed the old farmer, seizing the notes; "why that never can be. How canst ta ha' done that?"— But it was so, and Mr. Screw Pepper declared nothing had been easier to manage. "I asked the man," said he, "to go and take part of a bottle of wine with me. In the course of conversation we grew merry together, when, poking the fellow in the side, I said, 'Commend me to you for a deep one! I 've heard of the clever trick that you played off on Farmer so and so. Ha! ha! that beats me hollow. I could hardly believe the farmer such a fool!' —'Oh,' said the fellow, 'he 's fool enough for more than that. I could chouse him again as easy as this' —snapping his fingers. 'You really did it then?' said I, admiringly. 'It really was true? I never thought it more than a feigned joke!'—'Did it? To be sure I did!' said the fellow, off his guard— 'and' —'And you must pay the money!' said I, seriously, 'for I am his evidence, and will arrest you at once, if you do not.' That 's all that passed— nothing in the world could be simpler."

This anecdote wonderfully spread the fame and extended the practice of Mr. Screw Pepper all through the country, and it was no longer necessary for him to walk round the town with tape-tied paper, or to take the coach to a distant rabbit-warren and seek practice by eating sandwiches, and whistling after them under the flowery gorse-bushes in May. He was a welcome and merry guest amongst the farmers on

Sundays, and his sharp practice became from year to year more widely diffused and known. He had long been the attorney of Ned Stocks and Peter Snape, and to him they now betook themselves.

Mr. Screw Pepper rubbed his hands as the prospect of this business opened upon him. Mr. Henry Flamstead and the estate of Dainsby Old Hall! Never had such a goodly prize fallen into his net. Never did he expect such a splendid one from such clients as Ned Stocks and Peter Snape. When he had sounded the depths of the business, and had come to a full knowledge of the meeting of the creditors, of who they were, and of something like an idea of the extent of the claims on the estate, he was hardly able to contain himself, for he saw a most glorious field of legal enterprise, speculation, and peculation before him. He therefore assumed a very serious air, and told his worthy clients that it was a very serious business, and that they had done quite right in coming at once to him. From what they had informed him, he now informed them in return, by the aid of his superior knowledge, that not a moment was to be lost. If they had gone begging and praying for their money, dallying between Mr. Flamstead and that old fox, his lawyer, as Mr. Screw Pepper called him, the consequence would most likely have been that some of the greater creditors would have struck the docket against Flamstead; he would then have been bankrupt, and amid the mass of heavier claimants they would have been thrust into the back-ground, and probably have come off, in the end, with Hobson's share, something less than nothing. But now, he hoped so at least, they were the first in the field—they would seize time by the forelock, and procuring

a statute of bankruptcy against their debtor, they would, instead of the last, be the first of creditors.

It would be impossible to describe the alternate terror and eagerness of the two men, as Mr. Screw Pepper thus harangued them. At one moment they were fit to die with fear lest some one else should get the start, and that they should have no weight in the matter; at another they fairly cried out, "Haste, haste, Mr. Pepper, haste, and get hold of the property."

Mr. Screw Pepper, indeed, let no grass grow under his feet. Mr. Henry Flamstead scarcely knew that this man of sharp practice was employed against him, when to his utter consternation and inexpressible surprise he found himself a declared bankrupt. Every exertion was made by his attorney to have this set aside, and the business arranged by a simple assignment to his creditors, and for the estate to be put in trust for them till the claims upon it were liquidated, and which, by a statement drawn up by him, showed could be readily done in at farthest seven years; but Mr. Screw Pepper was far too great a master of artifice for him. He represented the state of the times; the almost nominal value of the property in consequence, and the very heavy claims on this estate. Assignees were chosen to manage the business, and these were such as Mr. Pepper more particularly wished to work with. His representations to the main creditors were very different to those which he made to the Court of Bankruptcy. To these he declared that everything depended on management—that he had no fear that with the assignees appointed he should be able to pay to every creditor twenty shillings in the pound. These, relying on his well-known business powers, depended very much upon him, and the conduct of

the affair fell very much into the hands of himself and a small knot of creditors who were least likely to interfere with his proceedings, amongst whom were conspicuous Ned Stocks and Peter Snape.

CHAPTER VIII.

DARK DAYS.

The thunderbolt of calamity had fallen on Dainsby Old Hall. The effects of it who shall describe? If we were to say the reader can imagine them—it is no use attempting to describe them—the reader might very probably imagine something very melancholy and very desolate, yet very different to the truth. If we do attempt to describe them we are not sure that we shall in any adequate degree succeed.

Who, indeed, could represent the gloom without and the death-like coldness within the hearts of those on whom this blasting bolt had fallen? This, so lately happy and joyous house, that so lately happy and united family. There was a silence not merely in the house, but in the very courts and gardens around it. The very cattle scarcely lowed; the very birds seemed to have been terrified, and ceased to sing. The dogs that used to meet the bounding steps of the young people with frantic leaps and barkings, now silently wagged their tails, gazed with a wistful, melancholy look into their faces, and followed them in silence.

As to the family itself, it seemed that not merely misfortune but sickness had fallen on them; and in such a violent shock how could one be separated from the other? The mother was really ill in bed, the daughters were weeping by her bedside; George was wandering uneasily from place to place, from field to

field, and Mr. Henry Flamstead sat for days in his chair more like a ghost than a living man, and heaving such sighs! The reproaches which he cast on himself were bitter beyond description. His fine old house and estate, so substantial, so sufficient, so clear, and free from touch of lawyer and creditor, and now assuredly to be torn in pieces, and from him and his for ever, by such wretches as Ned Stocks and Peter Snape, and Screw Pepper. The very thought of this was often too much for endurance. Henry Flamstead would rise up, stride hastily to and fro, strike his hand on his forehead, and cursing his ambitious speculations, drop down again into his seat with the perspiration streaming from his face, and with groans of the deepest misery. "What would his ancestors say to this, could they see it? What would his children be? Beggars, miserable beggars!"

But Mr. Screw Pepper did not leave Henry Flamstead too much time to agonise himself with these reflections. He soon appeared at the Hall, and professing deep regret at the necessity for this state of affairs, in a tone that was anything but regretful, apologised that his duty to his clients obliged him to put a person into the house to prevent any suspicion of anything being conveyed from the premises.

This fact itself was a bitter baptism to Mr. Flamstead. With his delicate and sensitive feelings, the very circumstance that a spy must be set over him and his family; that he was, in his own house, a suspected and watched personage, as if he were capable of committing petty frauds; that he was to be treated by such souls as Pepper, Stocks, and Snape, as if he were a Pepper, Stocks, or Snape—that was degradation, that was sufficiently galling and humiliating; but what was still more so, was the

man sent for the purpose of being watch and guardian of the creditors' interests.

This was a faithful tool and servant of Mr. Screw Pepper, one Gideon Spine.

Gideon was, like his master, one of a large class, whose abundance, however, is often denied by the wealthy and well-educated amongst readers, because it is not the happy and fortunate who are made aware of the existence of such men; the two classes walk through life in very different places. What, indeed, have the happy and fortunate, the educated and accomplished, the writers and the readers of poetry and romance, to do with parish-officers and constables? It is another class who are made only too well acquainted with the existence of this class of men—the poor, or those who are about to become so—the unfortunate. The happy and the rich ride through the world rather than walk through it. From gay and pleasant carriages they look down on the dusty pedestrian throng, and care little who they are—whether they be of the devouring or devoured class. What interest have they in the wearers of coarse linen and threadbare Yorkshire? What matters it whether it stretch across the broad back of a parish-officer, or the narrow one of a parish pauper—over the well-fed sides of a harpy of the law, or the lean members of him of whom he is in pursuit? But in the great throng itself, into what close yet unsavoury acquaintanceship are its living atoms crushed! How they look into each other's faces, and instinctively know the beak from the victim—the leech from the poor creature on which it is about ravenously to fasten! Then how numerous appears in the thronged highway of life the genus to which Gideon Spine belonged!

Gideon was now an old looking fellow of fifty. Whether he had starved himself, or sordid cares did the work of starvation, he had a lean, bony figure, and a wrinkled and cadaverous countenance. He was tall—had large hands and feet—wore a coarse long coat of duffle gray, with huge pockets behind, usually stuffed full of papers, and red old pocket-books, whose sides were bulged out with their contents. He walked with a tallish and stout oak sapling, and leaned forward considerably in his walk. He generally had a good deal of gray hair hanging about his shoulders, and left his gray whiskers long and lank. He had a thin and drawling voice, and a still and cold manner, that to no man's knowledge had ever been lit up by a smile.

Gideon Spine had, for upwards of twenty years, been well known all round that part of the country as a parish officer of a large country parish, or, rather, sometimes of one parish and sometimes of another. He was engaged on the avowed ground that there was no man who could do the parish business so cheaply as he could. Whoever, indeed, could extract anything from Gideon Spine, in the shape of parish relief, could certainly have found honey in a wasp's-nest. Gideon's soul had a hardness as of granite; and it was neither the heat of indignation, nor the tenderness of entreaty, that could make any impression upon it. He was quiet, of very few words, and immoveable. You might have said that he possessed an admirable patience and self-possession, if he had had any feeling that was excitable; but nobody could remember ever witnessing any feeling in him, except of a pale and deathly anger, when any of his prisoners attempted to escape from him, when he has been known to rise into the most ghastly and malignant

fury, in which he would kick, and throttle, and strike the offenders on the head with his heavy oak sapling, in a murderous rage.

There was no appearance in which Gideon Spine was more familiar to the people than that of riding in a cart through the villages, with a family of wretched orphan children, whom he was conveying to some distant factory, where he made a well-known trade of selling them at the usual price of five pounds a-piece, for such a term as should entitle them to a settlement, and prevent the parish which employed him ever being troubled with them again. It was by frequently meeting him at sessions, on parish business, and seeing the admirable qualifications that he possessed for a servant of the law—his perfect freedom from anything like the weaknesses which poets and such effeminate people try to dignify with the epithet humanity—his stoic-like firmness and adherence to the only legitimate object of gaining his end, without any regard to cries, entreaties, prayers, or any other ill-timed interruptions—that Mr. Screw Pepper was made ambitious to engage him in his service. He had succeeded; and this valuable servant had now been some years his trusty agent in many a delicate business. Since Spenser described his iron man, Talus, who went thrashing his way through the world with his iron flail, there never had been seen such a man as Gideon Spine.

The trusty Gideon was now installed at Dainsby as watch and guardian of the estate of the creditors. He had his bed in one of the garrets—he was not particular where—took his seat in the kitchen, and eat and drank there without word or remark, whenever any meal was set on the table. Only once did he deign to open his mouth during the three first

days that he was there, spite of all the keen things which the indignant servants, who hated both his presence and his office, addressed to him, or to one another. Once, on the third day, however, at dinner, as Gideon stretched out his own knife, and carved rudely from the piece of beef to which no one invited him, a maid servant said—"You make pretty free, master, at other people's tables!"—"Yes," replied Gideon, coolly; "but not at thine, or thy master's!"—"At whose, then?" asked the girl. "At the creditors'," rejoined Gideon, and pursued his meal in peace, regardless of all the sharp shots of wrath and ridicule that flew about his ears.

Gideon Spine's regular employment was to keep a sharp look out that nothing was carried off; his incidental labour was to make an inventory of all that the house, garden, farm-yard, and farm contained. In the pursuance of both these occupations, he was now in one place and now in another, and opened doors, peeped into the most private rooms, and even walked into them, without the least ceremony. He had a pace as stealthy as a cat, and you never were sure where he was. In the garden arbour, when they fancied him away in the fields or the woods, for he undertook to count all the trees, by some mode of arithmetic of his own, and to cast up the whole amount of their value; and when they had been freely dealing with both Gideon and his masters—a low cough would apprise them that he was behind the vegetable wall, and had heard everything. In the midst of some confidential talk on their own affairs in their most private rooms, Gideon would coolly walk in and stand and contemplate a wardrobe, a glass, or a chest of drawers, as if estimating their value; and they might just as well tell the

furniture itself to go away as Gideon. He was a continual goad—reminding them from hour to hour of the reality of their melancholy and mortifying circumstances.

We must pass rapidly over the years of still deepening sorrow and trial that awaited this unhappy family. I say *years*, for such was the fact. It was not Mr. Screw Pepper's intention to let the estate of Dainsby pass too rapidly through his fingers. In the repeated and rigid examinations to which Mr. Henry Flamstead was subjected, in that process of the rack and the harrow which is called making a full and complete surrender of all his effects to his creditors, it soon became known to the assignees that the important property of the Clockmaker was, failing any re-appearance of the said Clockmaker, Mr. Flamstead's. This raised the cupidity of Mr. Screw Pepper to the utmost extremity. As if the estate had not been, if fairly dealt with, far more than sufficient to satisfy all the claims of the creditors, he represented to them how desirable and how just it would be to obtain possession of this money. That obtained, they would all be paid at once, and the estate might remain intact to Mr. Flamstead. He advised, therefore, that no sale of the estate should take place till the attempt had been made to secure this money, but the rents merely be collected to defray the interest of the debt.

Mr. Screw Pepper having effected this arrangement, immediately hastened up to London, and exerted all his arts of legal eloquence and finesse, to induce the banking-house which held this money in hand to surrender it to the creditors, but in vain. He commenced a suit against them for the recovery of it, pleading the long disappearance, and, accordin-

to all human calculation, absolute certainty of the decease of the Clockmaker, but with as little success; the house stood on the clear and simple words of the trust, and the court confirmed their view of the matter.

Mr. Screw Pepper, baffled here, did not, however, abandon his endeavour to grasp this golden treasure. He tried to persuade Mr. Henry Flamstead to surrender his claim on the reversion, holding out as an inducement that it would facilitate the settlement of his affairs, and might prove the entire salvation of his estate. So satisfied was he, Mr. Screw Pepper said, of the certainty of this property falling to Mr. Flamstead, that if Mr. Flamstead would grant a conditional claim upon it to the creditors, he had but little hesitation in saying, that all might be brought at once to relinquish their demands of present payment, and leave their debts in full confidence upon this joint security.

But Mr. Flamstead, great as was the temptation to save his estate, entertained too deep a distrust of Mr. Screw Pepper to consent to any such arrangement. He affirmed that the security of the estate was itself ample enough for all that stood against it; that nothing was more demonstrative of this than the fact, that, spite of all the law expenses thrown upon it, it still paid all the interest; and that the minerals, still untouched, were worth twenty or thirty thousand pounds. He demanded that the statute of bankruptcy should be withdrawn, and protested that nothing but the most false representations kept him and his estate in the circumstances in which they were.

Mr. Screw Pepper affected to regard these remonstrances as so many unwarranted attacks on his professional advice and conduct, and became only the

more bitter and exacting. In fact he was most deeply disappointed in his hopes of establishing a claim on the Clockmaker's wealth, and determined to revenge himself on Mr. Flamstead for his firm resistance to his plans. He commenced, therefore, a system of persecution, by which he hoped finally to break Mr. Flamstead's stubborn will. He caused him to be again and again called before the assignees, and to undergo the most shamefully rigorous and inquisitorial cross-examination as to the full disclosure of all his effects. He even called upon him to surrender the watch he wore—the beautiful watch—the gift of his uncle, the Clockmaker, in his boyhood, and which was endeared to him by numberless pleasant memories. Mr. Flamstead, bowed down as he was by the load of cruel indignities and sorrows that had been piled upon him, yet pleaded hard and imploringly to be allowed to retain this, urging that it was well known that the estate was more than sufficient for all demands, and that it could not be just to deprive him of his personal possessions. But Mr. Screw Pepper denied that the estate was sufficient, and declared this watch to be of far more than the value which could be allowed to remain with a bankrupt. With the obedience of a child he surrendered this precious gift, and had afterwards the mortification to hear of Mr. Screw Pepper parading it in his pocket.

Bitter potions were now rapidly administered. It was declared time to offer the estate for sale. It was advertised, bills were printed, and the family were ordered to quit the house. It would be in vain to endeavour to depict the utter misery of this time. Where should the broken-hearted family go on quitting their old home,—the home of so many generations of their ancestors, the home of so many blissful days,—where should they

go? Mr. Flamstead proposed to remove to a small cottage in the village that belonged to the estate; to have so much plain furniture from the hall as would suffice, and to be allowed a certain sum for the maintenance of the family till the affairs were wound up, assured, as he stated, that there would be a handsome remainder for himself. But every one of these requests were peremptorily refused. He was told that all must be sold—the cottage, the furniture, everything, and that no maintenance could be allowed to him till it was ascertained whether there was any surplus or not.

The reception of this intelligence seemed to stun the whole family, and to lay them prostrate on the very earth. Utter ruin and starvation stared them in the face. Where should they go? What should they do? There was not a family in the village that they had a claim upon for shelter, and a temporary maintenance. They had not escaped in their misfortunes those usual accompaniments of calamity, which give to it its truest bitterness. Their own relations had heaped reproaches of extravagance, mismanagement, and foolish ambition upon them, without offering them any consolation, or an asylum. There were many circumstances common to falling fortunes, which we cannot enumerate here, that contributed to sink them into desolation and despair. Mr. Flamstead had suffered terribly in health and spirits; a deep and depressing melancholy had seized upon him, and he was heard frequently to say, "Oh if my uncle the Clockmaker were alive, I should not be in this condition—I should not want a friend." His wife had sunk still more in health and spirits. The servants had been successively dismissed, and the elder sisters had at once to attend on their mother, and care for the younger children.

But there was one house and one heart that was open to the afflicted family, and they were those of the widow Westbrook.

Farmer Westbrook, we have seen, was the first to give a place of reception to the methodists. He had now been dead some years, but his widow had continued the farm, which belonged to a merchant of London, and had managed the affairs with admirable ability and success.

The Widow Westbrook was one of those women that an Englishman loves to describe. She was in one word a genuine Englishwoman. She was comely in form and face, high-minded, warm-hearted, clever-headed, discreet, and yet bold. She was what is called a woman on a large scale; tall, portly, fresh, and active in carriage. She was not more than five-and-thirty, and had a handsome style of features, a fair ruddy complexion, and a voice and manner that made you feel at once that she was full of right sense nd feeling, and would scorn a mean action, as she would despise the man who did one.

After her husband's death, people said it would be a difficult thing for her to keep on the farm. It was a large one, and required good and stirring management. "It would be a very awkward thing," said many, "for a woman to go to market and chaffer about corn and cattle amongst a crowd of rude men." Nay, so far did some carry it, that they were kind enough to apply to the landlord for the farm itself, in case, as they expected, she would leave it. But Widow Westbrook declared that with God's help she had no thought of leaving it. Her husband had a lease, of which eighteen years still remained, and if she lived so long she hoped to be on the same spot when the lease expired. She soon showed that she was very

capable of managing her affairs. She put on stout ankle boots, and strode over her farm as boldly as any farmer. She went into fields even when ploughs were at work, stepped from furrow to furrow, and soon let the ploughman see that she had an eye to detect both what was well and ill done. In short, there was no farm that was better or more perfectly managed than hers. As to buying and selling, she had an upper labourer, an experienced and shrewd man, to whom she intrusted this business, after setting her own value on the cattle, and with success; and as it regarded her corn, there was a worthy miller who undertook to buy it at a time's price himself, or to dispose of it for her in the market, which he did to her high satisfaction. That miller was no other than Mick Shay. There were not wanting those who declared that Mick was over head and ears in love with the widow, and if it were so, it was no wonder. But Widow Westbrook had refused no less than five or six offers of marriage since her husband's death, and declared she would always remain single. Whether she had said nay to Mick Shay nobody could with truth tell; but everybody saw that Mick was regular in his calls there on his way to Derby market, and that they often talked a long time—a very long time over the yard-gate; but as everybody might hear, if they drew near, it was all about corn and cattle, hay and straw, and ducks and geese, and the like.

Mrs. Westbrook, after her husband s death, not only continued to carry on his farm, but carried on likewise his interest in the methodist society. She became a class-leader, and one of the most active, and judicious, and influential persons connected with the chapel. In this character she came much into the society of the Flamsteads, and a great mutual interest sprung

up between them The clear and sound judgment of Mrs. Westbrook was most confidently relied on by Mr and Mrs. Flamstead, and her energetic spirit often imparted its force to their more timid and languid movements. On the other hand, the thorough amiability and honesty of the Flamsteads greatly pleased Mrs. Westbrook. Strong characters are flattered by nothing so much as by seeing their plans and propositions followed out by their friends, and Mrs. Westbrook was always certain of having the support of the Flamsteads, if she once could convince them of the propriety of any object. The two elder daughters took the most affectionate fancy to her. To go round and see her superintend all the operations of butter and cheese-making; to gather vegetables and fruit for household purposes; to stroll with her through her orchard, and garden, and fields, and to learn, by watching and helping her, all the female acts of preserving, home-made-wine making, and so on, was not, though my fine-lady readers might think otherwise, in that simple country-place, inconsistent with the dignity of Squire Flamstead's daughters, even in their best days.

Mrs Westbrook took a lively interest in the attachment of Betsy to Robert Nadell, and many were the happy summer evenings in which these three took tea together in Mrs. Westbrook's arbour, and sat and talked on all that interested them in the little society of the place, their connections, hopes, and pleasures.

From the first moment that trouble reached the Flamsteads, Mrs. Westbrook had been the most zealous and sympathising of friends Could she have roused Mr. Flamstead to the spirited measures which she recommended, and which she, in her own case, would certainly have adopted, it is very questionable

whether Mr. Screw Pepper would have been able to establish such a power over the estate, or have carried things with the high hand that he did. But when she warmly counselled him to such, he only shook his head, and said there were particulars that she did not know of.

The day for removal approached, and Mrs. Westbrook was the true friend in need. She came the moment she heard that this was imperative, and said that they must all come to her till something farther could be done. It was in vain that they represented that they should fill her house from bottom to top, and that they knew not if they should ever be able to make her a recompense.

"The recompense," said Mrs. Westbrook, "is to come to me and let me feel that I can be of any use to my friends."

On the day that they were to remove, she had arranged that they should come and dine with her. There should be no spectacle, no stir, no melancholy procession. Her covered spring-cart should go up to the hall, and in it, laid comfortably on a bed and cushions, Mrs. Flamstead, who was in the lowest state of debility, should be quietly conveyed to her house without anybody being the wiser. The children should make a *détour* and cross over the fields by a road well known to them, and avoid the village and the gaze of the villagers; and Betsy and Nancy should walk down direct to the farm, while Mr. Flamstead and George should drop in as if by chance. The cart should go again in the evening for their effects, and the whole transfer should be made with the greatest quietness.

Melancholy and wringing to the hearts of all as was this abandonment of the home of so many precious

days and recollections, and with the prospect of seeing it made over to strangers for ever; yet, perhaps, no plan could so much lessen the force of their grief as this. They found themselves, without any formality of departure, all assembled, as they had often been before, round the hospitable board of Widow Westbrook, with the same comely and cordial face beaming welcome upon them as ever. But there was a weight and a consciousness of the reality which nothing could lift from their spirits. They were outcasts from their home and property; the future was dark before them. They could do little more than sit and weep together. In the evening came their effects. These were in reality nothing more than their clothes and their private papers. Everything else, even small pieces of furniture and nick-nacks, the gifts of friends, were not permitted to be brought away—merely the trunks which contained what I have stated.

We may believe that it was a melancholy and a sleepless night to all except the children, who, with the light-heartedness of childhood, which is regardless of the strangest changes in life, so that food and rest and the sight of nature be left them, were all day delighted to run about the farm-yard and farm, and to watch the turkeys, the pigeons, and the people feeding and milking the cows, and at night dropped into their beds as peacefully as they had done in the brightest days at the hall.

CHAPTER IX.

FRIENDS IN NEED, AND PLANS IN NEED.

But if the night were melancholy, the morning was still more so. The whole elder portion of the

family held a solemn council with Mrs. Westbrook, as what was best to do for the future. Not to weigh on her kindness for more than a few days they were resolved. George declared that he had well considered what was best for him already, and that there was nothing which he found too humble for him which gave him any degree of present support. He held it for certain that in fifteen years the whole property of the Clockmaker would be theirs, and raise them above all necessity; he did not despair but that something might yet be done to pluck the property out of the hands of the present unprincipled people who had possession of it; but till then, it became them not to be a burden to their friends. In anticipation of this event, he had been to the agricultural implement maker, who used to work for him, but who was now master of a justly flourishing concern at Derby, and had engaged himself as clerk and superintendent in the occasional absence of the master, at a salary of four-and-twenty shillings a-week. As he was also to be allowed to do actual work after the regular hours of business, he had no doubt of his being able to gain his five-and-thirty shillings or two pounds a week, and he hoped to be able to share at least twenty shillings of it with his family. That, he knew, would be but little towards their actual necessities, to say nothing of comforts. Something further must be sought to assist; none that could by respectable means obtain even a few shillings must neglect to do it, and if they only cured themselves of the false shame of resorting to labour, they should at least make an honourable conquest over false prejudices.

As George said this, his father gazed at him with a look of strange amaze. It was evident that nothing

so practical as this had ever entered his head during the whole course of his misfortunes. There was a singular contention of feelings in his bosom. He knew not whether more to admire George's energy wonder at his plans, or shrink from this humble track of usefulness that his son pointed out to him. But soon his own good sense, seconded by the cheerful outbreak of applauding voices from Mrs. Westbrook and his elder daughters, took the lead of all other feelings and sentiments, and he cried with Mrs. Westbrook, "Well done, George! that is brave. That is what we must all endeavour to imitate. It is no use now sinking into utter despondency. Those who have got the upper hand of us are not disposed to be very accommodating to us. Let us then not beg and sue to them. Let them not have the power to humiliate us. To work and maintain ourselves, watching for the return of a better day, is no degradation—it must be pleasing in the sight of God, and of every good man."

"Oh, Mr. Flamstead!" exclaimed Mrs. Westbrook, "how you rejoice me to hear you talk so. We will all see what is to be done. We will find out something, never fear, to make you all at least comfortable till, as you say, better days come—and depend upon it they will come. It is good for us to be tried; God knows that in his fatherly goodness, and if we are not the better for it, it is our own fault."

"Oh, what can *we* do?" exclaimed both Betsy and Nancy in one breath; "we will not be idle—we must, and will do something, but what; dear Mrs. Westbrook, help us to think what?"

"I have been thinking about it," replied Mrs. Westbrook, smiling; "and I think I have something already for you, Miss Betsy. I wish it were worthy of you—but we must, at first, get what we can."

Mrs. Westbrook then said that she had a friend in Derby, a milliner and mantua-maker in good business, and she had spoken to her of Betsy. She had told her what a beautiful needle-woman she was—what a fine taste she had in matters of dress; and her friend, who was a very good woman, would rejoice to have Miss Betsy's services for a time. She should, she said, sit in her own private room with herself and another young lady who was learning the business, to begin in a large way in a city in the West of England, a relative of her own; and though, perhaps, she should not be able to give Miss Flamstead much money just at first, till she got into all their ways, yet she could offer her a quiet home, with great privacy, and in a while, she did not doubt, a handsome remuneration."

Betsy agreed at once to accept this offer. She knew Mrs. Fernhead; she had often been at her shop; she was sure she would like her—and then she should be so near George.

"And me?" inquired Nancy, with tears and smiles in her eyes at once.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Westbrook, "you, dear little soul, must stay and be nurse and housekeeper to your dear parents. Oh, where can you be so happy and so useful? I shall keep little Edward, Jane, and Mary with me, and you will have the three others. You must have a cottage somewhere near here, and then we shall see one another. We shall often meet to cry a little, and to scold a little together, at the world and its worst folks. Oh, those good-for-nothing Screw Peppers, and Stocks, and Snapes, and Spines!—we 'll be happy in spite of them! We 'll, be happy in abusing them. Don't cry so now, Mrs. Flamstead—what 's the use of it?"

Mrs. Flamstead lay crying on the sofa, and the tears of her daughters fell as fast as her own.

"What nonsense it is!" continued Mrs. Westbrook, stealthily wiping tears from her own eyes, "what nonsense it is, when all will soon be well again. I know it will. I am sure it will. Who knows what God has in store? Who knows how he can and will confound all these poor, miserable, wretched people? Oh, a day will come! I feel as sure of it, as I am sure that that Screw Pepper is a double-dyed villain, and I shall see you all settled down again in that dear old house, just as if you had only been on a bit of a journey."

Thus ran on the good, kind-hearted, buxom widow, with a voice that had a wonderful power of comfort in it; and the afflicted family, now smiling, now weeping, began actually to feel as she spoke, as if such a day would one day come, and felt stronger and better. George and Betsy were impatient to enter on their new life; and in a few days Mrs. Westbrook sent them off together in her gig, while she sent their trunks by the carrier, and the next day persuaded Mr. Flamstead himself to drive her over to see that all was comfortable.

Mr. Flamstead had a strange shrinking at the idea of finding his son George, the long-regarded heir of Dainsby Old Hall, at work at an agricultural implement maker's, and his eldest daughter stitching away in a mantua-maker's shop. But when he actually saw them, he was surprised to find how little the reality was like his fancy. George was seated in a very respectable counting-house, occupied at the books; and in the ample warehouses of the ingenious mechanist was such a display of scientific and curious farming apparatus, as really deeply interested him.

Betsy was also seated comfortably in a small, but neat parlour, and was engaged with her needle on a fine piece of lace, just as she might have been at home. Both expressed themselves much satisfied, and were sure that they should be happy, if they could only know that those at home were so. Poor Henry Flamstead, humbled and stripped as he was, came home with a lighter heart.

Kind, and cordial, and cheering, as Mrs. Westbrook was, it was a depressing feeling to the sensitive mind of Mr. Flamstead, that there was he and his family, no less than nine persons, pressing heavily on the generous hospitality of the good widow; and he was anxious to get into a cottage of his own, however poor, though he really, as yet, could not tell where either the money to furnish it, or to furnish the table from day to day, was to come from. Mrs. Westbrook, though she threw no obstacle in his way, still said, "Pray, don't hurry, Mr. Flamstead, there is no occasion—let us see what may turn up in a while."

"What *can* turn up?" asked he despondingly.

"Ah, that I cannot tell. How can one tell all the plans which our good Father in Heaven has for us? But something will—you 'll see something will—as sure as the sun is sent round the world every day to look after us all like a great shepherd, and to scatter cocks of hay and strengthening corn amongst us, God's human flock, as he goes."

Mrs. Westbrook smiled so sweetly and confidingly as she said this, that Mr. Flamstead could not help looking at her with a sort of feeling that she had something more on her mind than she said—that one did not see into all *her* plans. Be that as it may, one evening, about a fortnight afterwards, Mick Shay came hastily into the Widow Westbrook's. The

widow had been all round the village all the afternoon with Mr. Flamstead, looking at cottages and rooms in houses to see what would best suit his family. So eager was he to get into one of them, as if Mrs. Westbrook's good table, flowing with the milk and honey of plenty, and ungrudging kindness, had in it something that quite made him in a hurry to get away from it—so he thought this—and then that, and then the other, would do excellently. To none of them, however, did Mrs. Westbrook seem very much inclined; one was too small, another too gloomy. They must really have something sunny, and with a sunny garden, though it was small, and the third was actually damp. Oh, they would get lumbago, rheumatism, consumption, there. "It's all in good time; don't you think so, Michael?" said Mrs. Westbrook, "all quite in good time yet."—"Did you ever gauge a boat, Mester?" asked Mick, without making any reply to the question of the widow.—"No, I never did," replied Henry Flamstead.—"But you could, no doubt, with a very little instruction. Lord bless me! it's the easiest thing in the world. You just poke a stick with marks ready made on it down the side of a boat, as it 's on th' water—here and there—and then look at a little book wi' tables o' figures in it, and then you have an exact account of the weight o' coals or other goods i' th' boat."—"I have no doubt," replied Mr. Flamstead, "that I very soon could do that."—"Oh, for that matter, I could soon do it myself, though I never war much of a hand at reckoning," said Mick, "but if you think that just that easy sort of a thing would suit you—just till your own affairs take a turn—why, you see, I think you can have it."—"Can I?" demanded Mr. Flamstead eagerly, who saw a prospect of sup-

port open before him, just calculated for his not very hardy frame or turn of mind. "What is it, Michael? Is it on the canal—Oh, pray what is it?" —"It's just what you say," returned Michael, "I heard th' other day that th' clerk on th' Cromford Canal, at Coldnor Park, was going to leave—so says I, that's just the very thing for squire Flamstead, i' th' present distress. A more easy post—just to watch out of his house as the boats come, drop his stick into th' water, look at his book, say 'All's right,' and in again. A nice little house with the walls all covered with apricot and pear-trees. I've always admired how neat that house was, and what apricots and pears that man had—and there's a nice garden with a famous row of beehives—he'll leave the bee-hives to a sartainty—he'll never take the bees wi' him. It's just the thing, says I to myself, and no time's to be lost, 'faint heart never won fair lady,'" and here Michael glanced at the widow—"so I up and off to Mester Jessop o' Butterly. I know, says I, he's a man that has weight wi' th' proprietors, and he'll lean to a born gentleman, and a good gentleman, as sure as he is a gentleman himself. So I off, and gets speech of him, and blame me but he made th' blood fly out o' my heart into my heels!"—"How? Why?" inquired Widow Westbrook sharply.—"Why just by shaking his head. Thinks I it's all over—he's promised it to somebody or other before I knew—ding my buttons now! But he was not shaking his head about that after all. It was out o' regard to the squire's misfortunes—'Mick,' says he, 'I'm heartily glad that you're come as you are. Another hour and it had been too late; I am just going to the committee where there are forty applicants waiting; but I must have it for Mr. Flamstead

if I can—he's a worthy man, and that Lawyer Pepper is a d——d rascal: and I am grieved at my heart for Mr. Flamstead. But Michael,' continued he, 'you 've your horse with you I reckon, so mount and away with me: there 's no time like the present. You can wait a few minutes there, and you 'll know the upshot of the business at once.' So off we went, and as we rode along he would have me tell him all about this bad business, and the goings on of this Screw Pepper. At which he shook his head again, and never said another word till we got to the Inn where the committee were sitting. But heaven help me! I could ha' cried, really I could, to see the crowd of poor, thin, down-looking men there were all anxiously waiting here about this place. They were evidently men that had suffered a deal. They had supped on sorrow, and breakfasted on nothing. And how they had brushed up their old threadbare coats, and put on the shirt that had the decentish collar and wristbands. Oh my! but those pale, thin faces, they couldn't brush up them, and when they saw me come, what a look they gave me, as if they saw another enemy. 'Mick,' said some of them that knew me, 'why sure thou art not a candidate?' 'Why not?' said I, for I did not know rightly what to say, 'why not? I dunna see why a man that can gauge a flour bag canna gauge a boat. I 've been so long i' th' dust, I think it would do me no harm to be in th' water a bit.' Burn it! I wondered at myself for joking—'it 's cruel,' said I to myself, 'it 's worse than a bumbailiff;' but I didn't know what to say—I tell ye—because, yo see, I *was* in some sort a candidate: And then that poor ghastly smile that they gave at my joke. 'Nay, Mick,' said one of them, 'thou artn't after the place or thou

couldn't make merry about it.' 'Merry,' says I, 'Heaven knows I am anything but merry—so let's have something to drink.' I flung down half-a-crown —that instant comes a man with a pen behind his ear, looks and beckons to me; and when I gets out, 'There's that,' said he, 'with Mr. Jessop's compliments.' I looks at the paper, but my hand trembled, my head swam, I couldn't read a letter—it looked all like scrawls and crooked ss's; so I stuffed it into my pocket and rushed out of the house. My horse seemed as fond of going as myself; he set off wi' a whuh; and it was not till I got upon Coldnor common that I got down, tied him to a gorse-bush, and began to read.—There's the paper—the place is yours!"

Who shall tell the joy and surprise that ran through all the assembled guests. There was more rejoicing, more tears of joy, spite of their pity for the forty disappointed candidates, over the unexpected gain of this little post, than if the whole wealth of the Clockmaker had dropped into Dainsby Hall in the days of its prosperity.

Those who had said that Michael Shaw was in love with the Widow Westbrook would now have said that the widow was perfectly enamoured of Michael; she looked as if she were actually going to embrace him, but she did no more than shake his hand cordially in both of hers, and exclaimed, "Michael! Michael! why, this *is* a feather in thy cap! Well, success to all honest millers for ever and ever, say I!"

"And Michael Shaw above all others!" exclaimed little Nancy, the tears starting from her eyes, nay, seeming to run all over her handkerchief which could neither stop them, nor the smiles which burst out like June sunshine from among them. Mr.

Flamstead shook Mick by the hand, but could not say a word; and Mrs. Flamstead as she lay on the sofa quietly weeping to herself, with two or three children clinging about her, thanked him by her silence too. Mrs. Westbrook was, in the meantime, bustling about, and in came the tea-things. The whole party sate down and soon were in a perfect ocean of plans for furnishing and flitting, and everything. The Widow Westbrook was to go with Mr. Flamstead and Nancy the next day to buy furniture, which Mick Shay and Tom Fletcher claimed the right of fetching and putting into the house.

All the business of that buying and flitting, the looking over the little house and garden, how well-pleased the Flamsteads seemed with all, and what satisfaction they promised themselves in the humble premises, and how Mrs. Westbrook and Mick Shay came actually together the first day that all was completed, and drank tea with them, all this we must leave to the imagination of the reader. In a very few weeks everybody seemed settled into his or her place as if it had belonged to them for years. Henry Flamstead, although still to all appearance a melancholy man, performed his duty with attention and to the full satisfaction of the company. Nancy was as neat and thrifty a housekeeper as one could see anywhere. There were three of the younger children with them at home, where Nancy instructed them when her work was done, and who played and weeded in the garden at other times. Mrs. Flamstead was really better as if with the very change of air. The other three children were with Mrs. Westbrook, and every Sunday the whole family, by the good widow's peremptory order, met at her house, went to the chapel together, and spent the day in much

quiet satisfaction; George and Betsy excepted, who, however, were generally with them once a month, and George who was a good walker much oftener.

Though we are not to suppose that former days, that Dainsby Old Hall, or the state of the family property and affairs were ever out of their minds, or that they could be perfectly happy under such circumstances, yet they were not the less thankful to a good Providence for so good, though humble a position as they had found for the present. Their real religious feeling was only the more deepened by their misfortunes, and they could now more forcibly bless God for the benefits they enjoyed than they could formerly for the most abundant flow of their good fortune.

It was true that the active Screw Pepper was busy with legal chicanery with the Dainsby estate, and, as was said by the knowing head-shakers, drawing the very marrow out of it for himself. It was true that his creature, Gideon Spine, with his vulgar dowdy wife and children, was located in the hall, and was duly seen going round with his book from farm to farm, cottage to cottage, collecting rents and arrears of rents. It was true that with fortune's smiles, many another smile had vanished from once friendly faces, but yet there was a support and a haven for the present, and good hope for the future.

"Were but my uncle the Clockmaker alive, how soon all would be right!" still sighed Henry Flamstead; yet he was always reminded that if he were not here himself, his wealth would ere long be theirs, and set all in order again.

Through all, Mrs. Westbrook was the steady, animating, and counselling friend. She was not content even to be that—she broke forth in no sparing terms on all and every one who seemed to forget in

the present conditions of the Flamsteads, the friendship and favour of the past times. One instance of this I must not omit,

Dainsby Old Hall had always been the welcome and cheering home, and resort of the methodist ministers who came to preach at the chapel. But when misfortune fell on the Flamsteads, the place of entertainment became the house of Mrs. Westbrook. She soon began to notice that some of these preachers seemed to come and go and make little inquiry after their old friends and entertainers. She was inwardly piqued, but for some time she said nothing except to herself, which was this, "So, they have forgotten the roof that covered them; the table that was spread for them; the hand that fed them and welcomed them. Now, that which is *their* case would be *mine* also. Oho, youngsters! but I shall take you to task though!"

These preachers were, it must be understood, chiefly young men, who were called local, or occasional preachers, that is, preachers who were in a process of initiation for the regular ministry, or who were a kind of amateur preachers in their own neighbourhood; men in business who had not any ultimate ideas of being anything more. These preachers are generally sent into the country, especially those who are making their first essays, and thus, while acquiring, by practice, confidence and experience themselves, serve to relieve the labours of the Regular or Round Preachers, so called because they go certain rounds in a fixed district. Many of these young men were, as the greater number of the Methodist preachers of that time were, persons of very little education, nailers, potters, framesmiths, and such like from Belper, and such manufacturing places. There were truly many things which they

had to learn, and Mrs. Westbrook did not fail to do her best to enlighten them on many points, and now especially on this. "How is it," she asked, "that you do not go to the Hall now?"—"Oh, it is in the hands of the creditors; we could not do that."—"True, not to eat and drink, or to sleep—but you could at least go, and ask Mr. and Mrs. Flamstead how they do."—"Oh, we 've done that at the chapel."—"Well, that 's something, to be sure; but I should like you much better, let me tell you, if you went and did the same at the Hall. It used to be no trouble to go there." When the Flamsteads had left the Hall, and were located, as we have just seen, "Well," Mrs. Westbrook would ask of one or another of them, "do you ever, in your rounds, look in at the Flamsteads? Do you ever see Miss Flamstead, or Mr. George, at Derby?"

The answers to these questions did not altogether please her. They had not been lately at Derby; they had not been either at Mr. Flamstead's lately; they were so driven for time to go to the places where they had to preach, on Sundays and other evenings; that they were often pinched for time, and so on."

"My youngsters," thought Mrs. Westbrook, "I must cure you of this coldness towards old friends under a cloud. That is not the way that I want to see religion taught."

There was about to be a great preaching and collection on the anniversary of the opening of the chapel. The liberal contribution of Mr. Flamstead being necessarily withdrawn, made a zealous effort for the chapel funds imperative. Mrs. Westbrook exerted herself for this purpose; and the most distinguished man of the whole society, at that time, the Rev. Jabez Bunting, was prevailed upon to come

down to preach the anniversary sermon. That circumstance was in itself success. People flocked at the news from the whole country round. The chapel was crowded to excess; and amongst the rest were seen almost every preacher of the vicinity. The Flamsteads were all in their old seat; not with the air of gay prosperity as formerly, but with a sad, subdued, and yet grateful expression of feature and bearing. The preacher spoke especially of the changeableness of fortune, of the deceitfulness of riches—and of that deceitfulness being often made by Providence, a means of discovering the deceitfulness of the world. He drew various pictures in which people of the world dealt deceitfully "as a summer brook, that by reason of drought passeth away,"—and he said, that Christ, *our* teacher and example, had declared, "It shall not be so among my disciples." "By this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." He then declared how earnestly he longed that the society, and especially their ministers, would seize on and maintain that glorious mark of Christian membership and Christian contrast to the world. That they should, great and small, rich and poor, be bound together in a bond of union stronger than all the ruling powers of the world, and triumphant over all its guile. On his brethren of the ministry did he particularly call to maintain the great and godlike testimony of Divine love. "I have sometimes heard with regret," said he, "my brethren of the ministry say, 'we fear to call too much on such and such, in his present circumstances, lest we should be burdensome'—but, oh, my brethren, what burden is so heavy and crushing as the burden of unkindness and neglect!"

If any one had watched the countenance of Mrs

Westbrook, while the preacher was in reality dealing these hard blows that were felt in all their weight in certain bosoms, they would have seen a singular expression of satisfaction and humour in her eyes and about her mouth, which at length vanished in a deep and tender emotion.

The moment the service was over, Jabez Bunting descended the steps of the pulpit, and, going into the seat of the Flamsteads, shook them all, with the most cordial kindness, by the hands; and, after he had shook hands also and greeted many others of the congregation, he gave one arm to Mr. Flamstead, and the other to his wife, and walked on with them to Mrs. Westbrook's, where a large company of the congregation dined together. From that day Mrs. Westbrook had no longer any need to lecture the young preachers on recollecting our friends in trouble.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST DROP TO THE FULL CUP.

THE fury of the tempest of misfortune seemed to have spent itself on the Flamsteads. They had found a humble but secure shelter from it, and each discharging the duties of his new position, awaited in patient resignation the better unfoldings of the future. But that future was not to arrive without a deeper baptism.

"Where is Robert Nadell?" it began to be frequently asked by one and another of the Flamsteads. "I have not seen him lately; I do not see him so often as formerly!"

"Where is Robert Nadell?" I have no doubt that many a young reader has already asked. And I

wish, with the Flamsteads, that I could give a good account of this young man.

In the first outbreak of their trouble he had been most generous and sympathising, most kind. He was always with them trying to cheer them up; assuring them that things would turn out better than they imagined. He had entreated his father to come forward and assist Mr. Flamstead with money and advice, and when he found it vain, no one had so deeply regretted it as himself. He spoke warmly and indignantly of the coldness and selfishness of the world. He was always with George, managing such affairs as Mr. Flamstead was prevented from attending to by the pressing circumstances in which he was suddenly placed. He read to Mrs. Flamstead, and was, to all the young children, like the best of brothers. The whole family was charmed by his truth and affections. Betsy was prouder than ever of her choice, and Nancy was most eloquent in his praise. Mrs. Westbrook often said to him, "Mr. Nadell, you have acted like a man! You know not how much I admire you—but only hold on!"

"Why do you always say 'hold on?' asked Nancy quite affronted, "do you think that Robert would change? Has any one behaved more nobly, more like a true friend than he?"

"That is just what I say," Mrs. Westbrook repeatedly replied to Nancy, "I admire Robert Nadell's behaviour so much that I am jealous lest he should ever change."

"Change! how you do talk, dear Mrs. Westbrook," repeated Nancy, "I cannot tell you how disagreeable your words sound to me—for Heaven's sake never say so again!"

But many months were not passed before poor

Nancy thought often on Mrs. Westbrook's words, and felt a still colder feeling accompany the memory of them than had attended their utterance. Robert Nadell certainly did not come to see them so often. True, Betsy was at Derby; George was there, and there, of course, Robert would go. They had nothing to amuse him at their poor house, no fields, no woods, no shooting, no fishing, no George, and above all, no Betsy—why should he come then so much?

But unfortunately George, when he came home, began also to ask the same questions. "Where is Robert Nadell now-a-days?"

These questions were often followed by a strange silence. It was true that Robert still did come to Coldnor—still did go to Derby, and on such occasions was most kind, most friendly. But somehow George found and Nancy found that there was not the same transparency of character—the openness of mind about him. He did not talk so much of his hopes, his views, his plans. Betsy made no such inquiries; "and," said Nancy, "surely if Robert did not show the same warmth of attachment, the same zeal as formerly, she would. She would tell *me; we* have never had any secrets and obscurities between us!" Then again fell the strange words of Mrs. Westbrook on Nancy's mind, and she resolved to write to Betsy and put some searching questions to her. She did so, and Betsy wrote back immediately, "Oh no! Robert was not cold, not changed! He was still as kind, as true as ever; but he was in trouble. His father was, as was quite in keeping with his worldly character, now quite opposed to the match. He had been very severe upon Robert regarding it. Robert had communicated all his troubles to her, and she

had offered to set him at liberty, cost what it would, rather than be the cause of family disunion between father and son. Besides," said she, "she was proud; she was a Flamstead, and if she were not to have a penny, would not enter a family that thought itself disgraced by her."

This letter filled Nancy with indescribable trouble She was hurt that Robert, who was young enough to wait, ay, even for ten years, should not quietly let his father's opposition blow over, without troubling poor Betsy with it, while she was away from her family. She, too, was proud, and said indignantly, "What! is not Betsy Flamstead good enough for that miserly curmudgeon? Oh, I wish it were but me! I would soon let the old gentleman see *that*, if my heart would break for it; I would refuse the finest lord in the land, if he would not prefer me to the Queen herself! But, alas for poor Betsy! Oh! shall she be miserable!—shall she be despised! It is a shame—I cannot bear it. I will away to Betsy. I will see Robert, and talk to him—that I will."

Nancy was, in fact, soon over at Derby; and soon sent for Robert from his father's house. She was, as was inseparable from her nature, warm, indignant, vehement, and full of trouble. She told him that she had advised her sister to give him up, if he showed the least coolness, the slightest unworthiness. She was too proud of her sister to wish to see her allowing any one to hold her, except on the terms of that pride which any honourable man would feel in her attachment. She wept impetuously, and then declared that if she could believe Robert Nadell anything but the true and noble gentleman, he had ever showed himself, that was the last word she would ever speak to him.

The consequence of all this scene was, that Robert Nadell protested, and that with tears, that never had he been more entirely attached to Betsy Flamstead; and never had he been more proud of her than in her present situation; never for a moment had he entertained any thought but that of the profoundest pride in her, and affection for her. Nancy shed a fresh flood of tears, then lighted up as rapidly into radiant smiles, and Robert departed, leaving behind him an impression of the most unbroken truth.

But let us take a peep at his reception by his father the same evening, as he entered to supper. The father was a stout, gentlemanly man, who had spent many years in the army, and still bore the name of Captain Nadell. He was a rosy-complexioned, cheerful, and good-natured man, according to common opinion. A very fluent man in company: a man who had seen a deal, and heard a deal of the world. He knew, indeed, so much of the world, that he had no idea of his son's marrying, except so as to ensure a good portion of its favour. So long as the Flamsteads were the Flamsteads of Dainsby Old Hall, it was all very well. He never asked the reason of his son's going there so much—it was quite natural. George and he were inseparable cronies; and, besides, there were the Miss Flamsteads, very charming girls—no harm could happen there. When Robert used to return from Dainsby, his father used to joke him pleasantly, and ask him how the Miss Flamsteads were, and especially Miss Flamstead, but that was all. He never told his son that he fancied Miss Flamstead had particular attractions for him, or that it would be agreeable to himself to see such an allianee. When others rallied him on Robert being so much at Dainsby, he took it all very smil-

ingly; "Young people," he said, "would flock together —it was all very natural." That was all the perspicacity that Captain Nadell gave to his wishes.

But now, since the fall of the Flamsteads, it was with a very different greeting that Robert was received from his visits to them. "Well, Bob, where have you been?—not to the Flamsteads again, I hope. You surely are not so green as that. You have no idea, I suppose, of marrying into a ruined family. Of course, you know that to marry one of such a family, is to marry all—a pretty marriage settlement, indeed. Let me just tell you, Bob, it is easier to get into a trap than to get out of it. But if you get into a marrying trap, with a needy woman, there are just four ways of getting out of it: first, by undergoing a good horse-whipping; secondly, by having a bullet put through your head; thirdly, by paying a good sum of money; and fourthly, and lastly, by marrying, which, in such a case, is by far the worst alternative of all."

To this exposition of parental and practical wisdom, Robert ventured to say something about old friends; of the meanness of deserting such in trouble; of the great expectations of the Flamsteads still. To which his father only replied, with a knowing smile, "That a green goose was reckoned a very good sort of thing, but that such a green goose as a young man stuffed with all these old-world and romantic notions, he never wished to see at his table. To be plain," concluded he, "do just as you please, Bob; marry a mantua-maker if you like, but don't expect that one penny of my money will be bestowed on such an ass!"

. Such was the lecture which was bestowed on Robert Nadell on that evening after his affecting interview with Miss Nancy, and which was, with much other banter, often repeated to him. But this was not

all; the cunning father understood military tactics well enough, to turn many another battery of social ridicule upon his sentimental son, in the circle of their friends. He sent him to make a tour amongst his numerous relations in different parts of the kingdom, and earnestly desired, by private letters, that Robert should be exposed to the most dangerous assaults from the ranks of beauty, wit, wealth, and accomplishments.

Shall we confess that this succeeded? Shall we add another to the list of faithless lovers? The fact is stronger than our inclination, and we are forced to say that Robert Nadell, to use the mildest term, was a weak young man. He was like a thousand others, who mean well, exceedingly well; who would never fall if they were never tempted; who would even go right and act nobly, if they were always surrounded by the good and the generous; but who are too weak of nature or of purpose to resist the influence of those about them. Before that summer was over, Betsy Flamstead, in reply to a letter to Robert Nadell, complaining of never hearing from him, received one from him, dated from the north of England, expressing all his old affection, but confessing that such was the opposition of his father and friends, that he saw nothing but ruin for them both in such a union, and therefore, with the persuasion that he should never be happy again, he thought it was better that they should for ever abandon their long-cherished hopes.

Sick at heart as poor Betsy Flamstead was, she nevertheless wrote a letter in reply, overflowing with the most generous sentiments, and bidding her lover, with her warmest blessing, be as free as the winds; and within a month received the certain intelligence that Robert Nadell was about to be married to a

wealthy heiress, of whose beauty and wit fame spoke in most eulogistic terms.

The poor girl had buried in her bleeding bosom the dissolution of her engagement with her faithless lover; and now the news of his perfidy came to her, mingled with indignant upbraidings of him, from her own family, and especially from Nancy. Fain would she have defended him to her own heart and to them, but it was in vain. His conduct had been cruel beyond words, and she brooded on it over her daily work, and laboured on with a feeling that could not long endure. It was not many weeks before Mrs. Westbrook was informed by her friend, Mrs. Fernhead, that something was sadly amiss with Miss Flamstead; there was some heavy trouble on her mind, she was sure, and she really was not fit for her daily business. Mrs. Westbrook only too well divined the cause. She hastened to Derby, and was shocked to see the change in poor Betsy. She took her home with her immediately, and tried to comfort and amuse her, but Betsy begged to be allowed to go to her own home, to her parents and sisters, where she still rapidly faded away under the most fatal species of consumption—that of the heart. Poverty and daily labour she had borne like a heroine—borne it bravely, cheerfully; but to feel that she was despised, deserted, for her poverty, by him on whom her heart rested as on her faith, stung her to the very heart's core—was like the rude hand which breaks the green corn-stalks, so that nothing can ever raise them again.

The home of the Flamsteads was now truly a home of desolation. All former troubles became forgotten in this cruel sin against one of the gentlest spirits that ever appeared on the earth. This admirable daughter and sister, who had surrendered all her bright pro-

spects almost without a sigh, who had submitted to daily labour as if she had been born to it, to lift off, as much as possible, the burden of care from her parents—to be thus rudely snatched away from life, for that was too evident, by one who had so well-known her, and all her love for him—it was bitter beyond words.

George vowed the most deadly vengeance. It was in vain that Nancy, whose quick resentment had tended in no small degree to inflame his, now terrified at the effect of her words, implored him not to do anything which might increase the affliction of the family. It was in vain that father, mother, and even Betsy, to whom suspicion of George's intentions somehow made their way, endeavoured to lay him under a promise not to meet Robert Nadell in any manner—it was well-known that he wrote to him, sought to get to his presence, and heaped all sorts of insults on him; to which he received only for answer, that Mr. Robert Nadell would on no account go out with him. He acknowledged that he had given him and his family sufficient cause of resentment against him; and he would not enter into any arrangement that might endanger his adding the most fatal increase to the sorrow he had already occasioned them.

These circumstances, however, tended to aggravate in no small degree the misery of the Flamsteads. From day to day Betsy visibly declined, and the fears which haunted the whole house of some dreadful affray between the two young men, hung like a thunder-cloud ready to burst upon the devoted family with more mischief. At length, in the last stage of failing strength, Betsy seized her brother's hand as he one day sate by her bed-side, and prayed him, as he valued her love, and would wish to cherish her

memory in peace and with a calm conscience, that he would promise for her final peace, promise for her sake, and for the sake of those religious principles in which they had all been brought up, and with which all her hope of happiness and of re-union was bound up, to renounce his vows of vengeance. The scene, the place were too solemn and sacred in their claims to be withstood. The sister who had been his companion in childhood, who had grown up with him as a shape, of joy and generous affection, now lay before him pale as the lily of spring, angelic as that heaven to which she was speedily to be summoned; and he, bent down with a passion of tears, vowed to fulfil her desires, ay, under all circumstances, be they what they might.

That very evening, as George strode back with a sad heart towards Derby, in a deep, hollow way on a solitary moor, he met suddenly, and face to face, Robert Nadell. The two young men paused and looked into each other's face. There was a deep silence—both were pale as death. At length Robert Nadell said, "I am unarmed—if you mean to fulfil your vows, I tell you once more I will not strike you!" There came another vow, like a lightning flash, across the mind of George: "You have already done enough!" he said in a deep voice, and strode on his way.

But these two young men were doomed to meet once more, and under still more striking circumstances.

It was not many days before the bell at Dainsby Church tolled for the passing soul of a maiden of twenty-two—they were the years of Betsy Flamstead, and every villager said at once, "She is gone!" They were right: and a week afterwards the bell was tolling

again to call her to her grave, to take her place beside her ancestors who had gone down to the dust, most of them in age, and with hearts that had slumbered as it were, along the path of life—not like her been cut down in her bloom by the sickle of unkindness.

With the simplicity of the place the funeral train went over hill and dale pursuing a narrow bridle-road that led more directly, and, indeed, with less observation to her native village. Far as they had had to come, her coffin was borne on men's shoulders, and three sets of bearers relieved each other. They went on to the singing of a psalm, and there was something deeply affecting as over the brown heath, and along the wood-side, now brilliant with the hues of autumn, that long sable train was seen by the solitary farmer in his fields, moving in the stillness of that retired region, and the mournful cadence of the psalm fell distantly on his ear.

But the funeral train had now reached a long narrow wood that filled up a deep valley between hilly fields. It had descended into this glen, that went by the name of Egriff Dingle, and the bearers of the coffin were just about to issue forth on the other side into the open fields, when a horseman came at a rapid trot round a bushy knoll and halted close to the gate, which was held open by a tall man who stood with his back to the horseman. The rider with the universal feeling of reverence, on such occasions in the country, instantly took off his hat, and sate on his horse bare-headed. But what was the astonishment of the pall-bearers as they glanced at him and saw that he was—Robert Nadell.

He was pale as death itself—there was an expression of astonishment and even horror in his countenance that could not be mistaken. It was evident that

this was no premeditated encounter—it was at once unexpected by him and astounding. It seemed as if horse and man were fixed to the spot. The black procession came up the steep ascent out of the glen, every figure stooping, as men do who climb a steep path, and every one, on reaching the gate, looking up and glaring with surprise on the horseman.

It would require the pen of an archangel to describe all that was expressed and felt by every one of those successive gazers. Who shall describe the effect of the quick, momentary glance of George Flamstead, of the woe-stricken paleness and meek sorrow of the father? If a file of deadly enemies, each armed with a loaded musket, had issued from the glen and fixed their eyes on Robert Nadell, it would have been nothing to the horror which then seized him. Years of conflicting agonies withered him up, as the glances of these injured beings fell upon him. He felt that scorn, contempt, and hatred were but a faint portion of the feelings that overwhelmed him. His heart, his life, his conscience seemed to him laid bare to the eyes of every one that passed, and that every one in succession pronounced his eternal doom. If the earth would have opened its mouth and swallowed him up, he would have blessed it. But the procession went on; the psalm again sounded its mournful melody, and there sate the tall horseman as if turned to stone.

The tall man was about to close the gate when he too became aware of the horseman. The man was Michael Shaw. He gazed at the figure of horror for a moment, and then said solemnly—"Robert Nadell, come on, the way is open. She whom thou hast murdered is going to her rest—but here is thy way—into the world to which thou belongest. Come on, Robert Nadell; and, dreadful as is this righteous

judgment, believe that God wills not thy utter destruction. His hand it is plainly that has led thee up here at this moment, for I feel sure that thou wouldst of thy own will have been far enough off to-day: and when that hand lies heavy on thee, as it will for years, day and night, summer and winter, in the field and in the city-street, let it have its way even when thou groanest under it, for it surely means to punish only to be merciful, or it would have left thee to the last and the long reckoning! Go, Robert Nadell, and if it can, peace go with thee; but when wilt thou have a peace like yon sleeping maiden?"

With a sudden glance at the speaker, as of a madman's, Robert Nadell struck his spurs into the flanks of his steed, and the animal snorting, dashed down the glen, and Michael Shaw, pausing a moment, watched him gallop onwards, till a sudden sweep hid him from the view.

CHAPTER XI.

JOHN FOX AGAIN.

It was at this crisis that Mr. John Fox arrived at Leniscar. The winter had passed over since the events which we last related. The Flamsteads in their little cottage were living still and retired, and bearing with resignation all the trials with which a wise Providence had seen meet to visit them. The turf had grown green on Betsy Flamstead's grave, and the violets, which loving hands had planted there, filled the air with their fragrance; and the yet unsoiled garland of white flowers, as was the village custom, swung from the chancel-roof above the pew of the Flamsteads, commemorating her early death.

Old Gideon Spine was still established at Dainsby Old Hall, with his wife and family, appearing in that quiet house as much in place as so many owls or jack-daws or rats that had got in since it was deserted. Gideon held no communication with the inhabitants of the village, except regularly every Monday morning to call at the cottages for the week's rent. He seemed to grow every day more and more surly and crabbed, and had already heaped upon himself a pretty good share of the people's hatred, about which, however, he appeared very little to concern himself. In the meantime, his master, Mr. Screw Pepper, had been busy with the estate, but had brought affairs as little apparently towards a termination as when he first got them into his hands. There had been no less than five years expended on the settlement of the bankrupt's concerns: there had been no less than seven sales advertised of the property, in one form and another, all of which had come to nothing. In one case, there was the confident prospect pleaded, of a sale by private contract, and, therefore, the public sale was postponed. In another instance, it was declared that the property was actually disposed of by private contract; yet in a while it was again made known that the purchaser had, after signing the agreement, run off from his bargain on some dissatisfaction or other; there had been legal process resorted to, to compel the completion of his purchase, but it had not succeeded. The rest of the sales did not obtain a bid equal to the valuation, and therefore the property had been bought in for the court by some one appointed for the purpose, on the plea that it would be unjust to the claims of the creditors to let the estate go on these terms.

All this, people saw very well, was making dread-

ful havoc with the property, by heaping a monstrous load of legal charge and other expenses upon it. In the meantime Mr. Screw Pepper seemed to flourish wonderfully. He had removed into a larger house, drove a handsomer carriage, with a full-sized and full-liveried servant, and was become much more lofty and consequential in his bearing.

It seemed to be extremely unpleasant to him that Mr. Flamstead had obtained the humble employment that he had. He determined to annoy him to the utmost. He declared that a bankrupt, whose affairs were not settled, could not have a house well-furnished without being called upon to account for the possession of so much property, and accordingly he did call upon him for such an explanation. Mr Flamstead appeared before the commissioners with the utmost composure, and showed with the most cool and perfect candour that every piece of furniture which stood in his house was a generous loan of the Widow Westbrook. This was a poser for Mr. Screw Pepper; but it only seemed to fill him with a more bitter spirit. He demanded an account of Mr. Flamstead's salary, which, besides the house, was one pound a week; and he declared that he considered this too much for a bankrupt, whose effects were of such trivial value that they were actually unsaleable, and that it was but fitting that he paid seven shillings per week to the account of the creditors. The pitifulness of this demand was too much for even the most sordid assignees, with the exception of Stocks and Snape, who thought it a burning shame that a man who owed so much money as Mr. Flamstead did, should be living in so much luxury; these worthy fellows, by-the-by, being annually in full receipt of interest of the whole of their debt on the estate.

Mr. Screw Pepper was not, in the meantime, beaten from his purpose of petty annoyance of a man whom he saw so thoroughly despised him, and whom he knew he was so deeply robbing and injuring. He stated to the assignees that Mr. Flamstead was not only in the receipt of one pound a week, clear of all reduction, but that he had every reason to believe that he had the assistance of friends and children. The children he had out at constant employment, who, as they were single persons, no doubt could and would confer part of their gains on their father. He called on Mr. Flamstead to make a full disclosure, on oath, of all such receipts. Mr. Flamstead declared himself perfectly willing to do so; but this was warmly opposed by the assignees, except the two notorious ones, Stocks and Snape, who were as greedy for this disclosure as if they were losing the whole interest, and were sure to lose the whole principal also. But Mr. Screw Pepper had not yet done; there was the old subject of the Clockmaker's wealth. He contended that, as the property was actually unsaleable, it was absolutely necessary that Mr. Flamstead should make over his reversionary claim on this property, and in this demand he was strongly supported by the assignees. But Mr. Flamstead as steadily refused. He declared, whatever might be said of the unsaleableness of the estate, he knew very well that it was worth far more than their demands upon it. He called upon the assignees to answer honestly whether every creditor was not annually and duly paid the interest on his debt; and he demanded that he should be put into possession of his own property, out of which he had been so unjustly driven; and that he would engage to pay every man his own. He said that now it was very

different to what it was when the war had just ceased. The corn-bill had now taken effect, and a high value was again given to landed produce; and that, if the estate were fairly brought to the hammer, it would not only sell for as much as it owed, but would leave a handsome surplus. Then there were the minerals—he had been told by Mr. Screw Pepper that they were of very little value—that no one would offer more than the merest trifle for them; and that while they found it impossible, when they were offered with the land, to obtain a bidding equal to the amount for the whole, on the other hand, when they reserved the minerals for separate sale, no one would bid at all for the land, declaring, very naturally, that the value of the land would be in great measure destroyed, if the proprietors of the minerals could come at any time and delve and turn it all up, topsy-turvy.

"Yet, notwithstanding this statement," said Mr. Flamstead, "I have heard, from good authority, that Mr. Pepper now offers the minerals by private contract, at a price equal to that of the estate itself; in fact, at such an extravagant price as totally prevented their sale." He ended by calling upon Mr. Pepper to answer, before the assignees, to this charge.

On this, Mr. Screw Pepper turned red, pale-yellow, and then broke forth into the most vehement denials of the truth of these abominable attacks, as he called them, on his character, heaping on Mr. Flamstead the most opprobrious terms.

The assignees were compelled to interfere, but Mr. Flamstead coolly and steadily adhered to his point, and offered to bring forward respectable evidence of what he asserted. Adding, moreover, that as it regarded the property of the Clockmaker, that even were the estate deficient, which he altogether denied, he never would consent to convey away that which was not his own, which indeed might still be the

property of a living man, and which might never become his, but his children's, who had no concern whatever with their father's management of his estate, nor were responsible for his deficiencies, nor called upon by law or justice to make good, out of funds furnished to them by a totally different person, the waste or imprudence of their parent. It was quite enough that they would derive nothing from that parent.

This spirited conduct of Mr. Flamstead, and the true character which he had dared to give of the proceedings of Screw Pepper, did not fail to fill that personage with the most diabolical spirit of revenge. He vowed vengeance, not alone for himself, but his two friends Stocks and Snape, who gloated over the very idea of it, saying, "Ay, that's right! trounce him! trounce him! Bring his proud stomach down!"

The very first steps towards Mr. Pepper's revenge was to mutilate the estate for ever, and to render it impossible that it should ever revert to the Flamsteads. He stated therefore to the assignees that as it had been found fruitless to attempt to sell the estate as a whole, it was now necessary to adopt another plan. The estate must be divided into so many lots, each of which would be sold separately as circumstances might dictate. Thus people of less property might be accommodated; farmers who might wish to buy a single farm to live upon; people who did not want estates but only investments. The house had better, as an incumbrance to any one lot, be at once sold in lots for building materials, and so pulled down and done away with.

It was in pursuance of this malicious policy that it had been, as already stated, found by Mr. John Fox measured out into sundry lots, and those lots chalked upon them in huge figures; a fact which had filled him with such a fit of indignation, and had sent him off in such a hurry to Derby. But

before we proceed to inquire what were the results of his expedition to Derby with Mick Shay, we must say a few words.

From the first of Mr. Fox's coming into this neighbourhood he had been particularly inquisitive after Mr. Flamstead. He seemed to cherish the most agreeable recollections of the times that he had spent at Dainsby with his friend the clockmaker. He heard with deep sympathy the story of the misfortunes of the family, and they were often a subject of conversation between him, Tom Fletcher, and Mick Shay. He listened with evident strong feeling to the relation of the mournful fate of Miss Flamstead, and made Mick Shay point out to him one Sunday soon after, the grave of this amiable young lady. He made Mick also introduce him to the Widow Westbrook, to whom he spoke in warm terms of praise for her genuine friendship to the unfortunate family. He delighted to hear Mrs. Westbrook talk of the Flamsteads, and she, in her turn, was also surprised to find how much he really knew of the family history. It had been, he said, a favourite topic of the Clockmakers in their rambles when in this neighbourhood. He went one day also in Derby to see George Flamstead at the agricultural implement-makers; saw a wonderful likeness to the clockmaker in him, when the Clockmaker was of the same age. He applauded George, whom he found shaping a piece of wood with an adze, with as much skill and as little false shame as the most regularly educated workman could possess, for his manly resolve to maintain himself by honest labour. It was just what his uncle the Clockmaker did, and he trusted he would find it as fortunate as the Clockmaker had done.

"But," said George, "I do not find that the Clockmaker was so particularly fortunate. That he entered into an honest trade was sensible and manly,

but to leave his business in its prosperity and take himself off, Heaven knows where, was not quite so great an evidence of sense."

"There you are right," said John Fox; "the Clockmaker's fate is a mysterious one; we will trust that in that particular yours will be different. I like your observations, young man. And pray what do you propose to do when you enter into business for yourself?"

George raised himself, and looking at the stranger with a peculiar expression said, "That's a very plain question, I may say, for one whom I never saw before; but as I see that you take some interest in our family I will answer it as frankly as it is put. My movements must be regulated by those of my family in a great measure. It is my first and bounden duty to contribute to their comfort. They have much at stake, and much to lose here. They have many children whose interests and happiness through life depend upon them, and they have many and subtle enemies, who are on the watch to snatch away from them every means of future support both for them and their children. I know not how far I may be able to defend or assist them, for I know little of the law, and we have few relatives who seem disposed to stand by us in the assertion of our rights; but I will do what I can, more or less, and I feel that I am called upon to be always at hand and always on the watch to be useful."—"That is well said," rejoined John Fox; "but were you not held by such considerations what course would you choose for yourself"—"For myself?" said George; "for myself there is but one choice—away to America. Here, to succeed, wants money, friends, a peculiar auspiciousness of fortune; but there!" said he, his eyes flashing with enthusiasm, "this axe would be enough for me, I would labour till I had some hoard of dollars, and then the far west should find me a field of action, in which I should not fear to find a new and

ample estate. What cannot youth, enterprise, study and perseverance accomplish, if they have but such an ample field?"—"There spoke the Clockmaker again," said Mr. Fox, smiling. "How do we see, every day, how much easier it is to see other people's faults than our own! It was but just now that you blamed the Clockmaker for the very spirit of enterprise which you now show yourself so entirely to possess."—"Yes, but," said George, "there is a difference. If I had here a business like the Clockmaker's, I should certainly stay and make the most of it. The Clockmaker abandoned both that and a really independent fortune to vanish—Heaven knows whither!"—"That is true indeed," said the old gentleman. "He might be of great service were he here now. But if he be not here there is a friend of his; and I say cheer up, George Flamstead; I like your spirit much, and there may come a day when I may be able to be of use to you."

He shook George cordially by the hand, bade him be sure to go to see him when he went to Leniscar, and went away leaving George full of strange speculations.

"This man," said he to himself, "seems a very sensible person. He seems to like our family; he may one day be of use, he says, and he is rich, Mick Shay says. Ay, what use might not such a man be of, if he were but such a fine fellow as one reads of in books. I should up and say to him at once, 'Here is a glorious opportunity to testify an old regard for a fallen family. What are a few hundred pounds to you? Stand by this Mr. Flamstead; you may rescue him from the harpies who devour him, and make a whole family happy without harming a single hair to yourself.' And the man should say in return, 'To be sure, you are quite right, young fellow; and I will do it.' How easily such things are done on paper—but stuff! it is not so easily done on this mercenary earth. One cannot fall in

with these heroes of romance—these men of great hearts and generous sentiments. All men, especially men of money, are now-a-days so dreadfully unsentimental. They are so abominably tradesman-like. I sometimes amuse myself—but that is not exactly the word—employ myself, as I walk the streets with examining all the gentlemen's countenances, to see if I could find a poet or a hero among them, and I know not how it is, I think I must be miserably uncharitable; there seems nothing but a cold, polished, selfish expression on all faces. No, this old gentleman, who, however, does what no one else does—walk out of his way to talk with a young fellow with an axe in his hand—will talk of sympathy, but that will be all; and that is all that I shall ask from him."

This old gentleman, however, did not only visit George, but his father also. He was sure of a cordial reception from Mr. Henry Flamstead, because he came to talk of the Clockmaker. He declared that he remembered Henry Flamstead as a little boy, having seen him once at his uncle's, and described his appearance and dress, which were exactly those of himself, in a miniature of himself at that age, which he possessed. He tried to recall some remembrance of the stranger, and had a strange feeling that he had certainly seen him—nay, could recall the tones of his voice—but yet could make out nothing clearly. They talked for many hours of the Clockmaker, for whom Henry Flamstead could not sufficiently express his affectionate remembrance; of the confidence he entertained, that, were he here, he would, by the energy of his character, speedily relieve him from his ruthless enemies. From this they went into the affairs of the estate; and the old gentleman, who seemed well acquainted with the laws and usages connected with property, displayed much interest in diving into all the intricacies of the question,

and in endeavouring to make himself master of all its difficulties. His good sense, his affability, his knowledge of the world and foreign lands, but above all his praises of the fine spirit of George, made Mr. Fox speedily a welcome visitor at the cottage; and it became a frequent afternoon's walk of his over there, when he would listen to all Mr. Flamstead's details of his views and his troubles with his creditors. It was not long before he seemed to have possessed himself of a clear notion of the case, and pointed out to Mr. Flamstead where he thought matters had gone wrong, and what were the great obstacles in the way of his ever recovering his property. That Mr. Screw Pepper was an arch scoundrel, and was pluming himself from the spoils of the estate, he declared himself as sure of as that he lived. He promised to keep an eye on the affair, and to give Mr. Flamstead any advice and aid that he could, whenever there appeared any opportunity of doing so. Mr. Flamstead was no little elated by the acquisition of the acquaintance of this able and experienced man, and was never so happy as when he saw him marching slowly down the towing-path of the canal, with his curious fox-stick in his hand. He was quickly seen from a little window near the fire-place, by which the approach of the boats was watched, and Miss Nancy, to whom he showed a great liking, speedily began to set out the tea-things, and send off one of the children for some fresh radishes out of the garden, and cresses from the brook that ran at its bottom. He was very attentive to Mrs. Flamstead, whose health was now much better, though she was far from having regained the sunny brightness and joyousness of her former life. Her genuine religion induced her to strive for contentment and thankfulness, that in the troubles that had overtaken them, they had been favoured with a haven of shelter, humble and lowly as it was. But the experience and habits of her whole

earlier life led her at the same time deeply to regret what they had lost, when she looked round and saw her troop of blooming children, and asked herself how they were to be educated—how established in life!—if they were really to descend from the station which their fathers had always occupied, and to have to battle with the roughest circumstances of life; it was enough to fall with a dismal heaviness on her heart. Then there was her excellent husband, patiently but with a downcast spirit performing his humble duties for his humble pittance, while the daily and the hourly thought of his bosom was the blight of all his hopes—the ruin of his paternal estate! Then there was George, so good, so sensible, so dutiful and self-sacrificing, who, instead of the heir of Dainsby, was the labouring companion of artisans; and, finally, there was the sorrowful fate of Betsey—a wringing memory to a mother's heart. It must be confessed that Mrs. Flamstead had enough to bend her down with sighs and tears!

On these subjects how many hours did she converse with Mr. Fox! There was a sincere tone of sympathy that drew her to him. He listened, and without denying that her sorrows had a deep and bitter root, he would still throw in a consolatory hope; things, he trusted, would mend. They had at least a certain, though a somewhat distant prospect of wealth, even if Dainsby were not rescued from its devourers. But even that he hoped. He was indignant at the lawyer. It would, he said, give him genuine satisfaction to see that fellow well exposed and punished. Nay, he would willingly give a few hundreds towards that object himself; for of all things did his soul loathe an undermining upstart of a pettifogging lawyer!

The energy with which Mr. Fox spoke on these subjects never failed to kindle their sympathy and lighten their hearts. Oh! how cheering, how in-

gratiating it is, when the world deals hardly with us, to hear the genuine tones of warm-hearted truth. At such times Nancy would draw near to the old man and gaze on him in admiration that she could not suppress, till, sometimes his eye catching the delighted expression of her face, he would put his hand on her shoulder and say, "Why, my dear girl, your face is a morning sun in spring; it seems to bring back all one's youth with its green leaves and its dew!"

But while Mr. Fox grew more and more interested in the Flamsteads, and more and more a favourite with them, when talking with Tom Fletcher and Michael Shaw, he would often say, "Well, Henry Flamstead is an excellent man. I think I never saw a man of purer and simpler mind and feelings. He is a real gentleman; but somehow, I must confess, that I do think he has been somewhat too much of the gentleman. How many generations had his ancestors kept Dainsby Old Hall and its lands together? and it is not to be supposed that any one of that old race of hardy, careful men, would have ever allowed a Screw Pepper, or any of his tribe, to put a foot on their soil. I am afraid that Mr. Henry was not altogether a man of business."

"No, that's just what I've always said," Tom Fletcher would remark; "he's a good gentleman as ever was born; but he's, let me tell you, too fine fingered, too delicate, for these times. It always used to give me a comical feeling when I seed him riding on a fine horse, with clean doe-skin gloves on. 'That was not the way thy fathers got their stuff together,' I used to say to myself."

"Hold thy tongue, Tom!" Mick would break in. "Do'st think it was th' doe-skin gloves and the fine horse that lost Dainsby? No—not it! It was change of the times. I'll say this, that I never saw a gentleman, no, nor even a farmer, look after his business better than he did. He rode a fine horse!

Well, he could the sooner look after a lot of men. He wore doe-skin gloves! Well, he was a gentleman, and had the education of a gentleman; and there's an old proverb, 'that a master's eye is worth a score of masters' hands.' Never tell me that Mr. Flamstead did not use his eyes! My word though, but I never met with a man, gentle nor simple, that knew the value of a quarter of corn better than he! But the times took him in, and many another, as clever as him; and when a man's down, it's down with him, and every fool is ready to set a foot on him. If Mr. Flamstead had not had a conscience, he would have beaten that Screw Pepper to nothing. But that's what it is; th' one's a gentleman with a conscience, th' other's a rogue without one; and it needs no conjurer to tell which of the two has the better of the strift. But this I say, and will say before any man, Mr. Flamstead has no occasion to hold down his head before any man alive, for he never did the thing that he need be ashamed of; and if right things prosper, and there's a Providence in heaven, he'll raise his head one day above all his enemies, and sit in Dainsby Old Hall again like any lord!"

That Mr. John Fox, although he seemed to side with Tom Fletcher, always evidently delighted to hear Michael thus hold forth, Michael himself thought; for when he went away on such evenings, the old gentleman would give him a hearty shake of the hand at parting, and say—"Good bye, Michael, thou hast a good heart at any rate." At which Michael would touch his hat, and say to himself, "And I think I know another that has."

Such were the conversations both at the Flamsteads' cottage and at Tom Fletcher's, that were suddenly interrupted by the journey to Derby, about the Old Hall. I must now take a view of the consequences of that hasty trip.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD CLOCK WOUND UP AGAIN.

On their arrival in Derby, Mr. John Fox ordered Michael Shaw to drive to the office of Harpur and Fife, the lawyers. This was the great law firm of the place. There was none of the small smartness of Mr. Screw Pepper's offices about those of Harpur and Fife. They were, on the contrary, spacious, still, and substantial. Mr. Fox dismissed Michael to the inn, bidding him be ready to attend to any message he might send him, and then entered the lobby of Harpur and Fife's offices. Here he saw on various doors brass-plates bearing the inscriptions—"Mr. Harpur's office," "Mr. Fife's office," "Clerk's office," "Private office," &c., &c. On another brass-plate in the wall stood conspicuously, "Porter's bell," and the handle of the bell hung just above it, with a "Here I am, you see; why don't you ring me?" sort of look. Mr. Fox instantly did ring it, and a grave man in drab livery appearing, he inquired whether Mr. Harpur was in. To which the grave man as gravely replied, that he would inquire. On this he stepped into Mr. Harpur's office, and came out again, begging to be favoured with the gentleman's name. It was given. Instantly the grave man returned with a much livelier air, and begged Mr. Fox to walk in. This he did, but instead of Mr. Harpur, he found only Mr. Harpur's clerk, who informed him that Mr. Harpur was not at this moment within. It was, indeed, far beyond the hours at which either of the principals attended at the office; but that if Mr. Fox had business of importance, he had no doubt but that Mr. Fife could be found at home, and he would send for him. Mr. Fox replied that his business was with Mr. Harpur, and that he must see him at once.

The clerk gave a sort of wondering stare, said that Mr. Harpur was not in the habit of attending to any but the most extraordinary business after four o'clock, and that now it would be just after his dinner hour, when they had the strictest orders not to send to him, except on matters almost of life and death. "Give me his address at once," said Mr. Fox; "or, by-the-by, I think I know it well enough—I will go to him."—"Very well, sir," said the clerk, as if he had the strongest certainty that the gentleman would not be permitted to disturb Mr. Harpur's evening repose.

As Mr. Fox returned through the lobby, the clerks' office-door stood open, and he could see by the lamps still burning that it was a very extensive apartment, and bore every mark of that great practice which Harpur and Fife were known to possess.

The clerk who, by Mr. Fox's manner, seemed inspired by a certain respect, and as if he had a feeling that the gentleman's name stood in the books in characters of importance, offered to send a guide with him; but Mr. Fox said that he knew the address pretty well by letter, and that he wished to try his memory as to the localities of the town; adding, as he bustled away, "And, besides, I've an English tongue in my head—I shall not get far wrong."

Mr. Fox made his way to a long and wide street, very different to any other street in the town, and paused before a pair of large gates, where the house seemed to stand in the court, within a lofty wall. A pull at the bell, and he was admitted by the lodge porter's wife, who, on his saying that he was going to see Mr. Harpur, unlike the clerk, made no remark, and let him pass on. Mr. Fox, by the well-lighted lamp which hung over the hall door, could see that the house and premises were of princely size and character. On one side of the court opened a fine garden; on the other, were the outbuildings.

There was a colonnade along the house-front, and the lamp-light flung down into it, showed lofty, and substantial, and well-painted, and well-kept doors and windows. In fact, all around displayed the presence of wealth, and a quiet state. Mr. Harpur, indeed, was the great legal man of the county. He had been near half a century in practice. He was the steward of half a dozen noblemen, and had had transactions with the affairs of many others, as well as with nearly every landed proprietor of the county. He was the clerk of the county court; treasurer of a variety of public institutions; and the great pillar on which the magistrates depended in all their weightier difficulties—the prisons, the house of correction, every such thing saw in him a visitor, and the most influential of visitors. In short, he was the great man of the place. There was nothing like the petty smartness of Mr. Screw Pepper about him, or his whereabouts. Quietness was the characteristic that belonged to him. A large, quiet house; ample, quiet gardens; quiet servants; a quiet, very lady-like wife, who, in a very well-built, but not showy carriage, made her calls on the ladies of the county, and was always at the head of all balls, assemblies, concerts, and such things, with her husband, and the *élite* of the town. Mr. Harpur was a portly man, whose well-fed countenance had the rich, but not rude tint, which evidenced of long enjoyment of haunches of venison and good old port. He could be very solemn, or very affable, and even jocose in his manner. To Mr. Screw Pepper, and such people, he was the former, and this man, always ready enough to show his airs to others, behaved with the profoundest respect to Mr. Harpur, and deferred to his judgment with the most ludicrous servility in matters of business.

Mr. Fox was speedily admitted to Mr. Harpur. The great man quickly appeared, recognised Mr. Fox as an old acquaintance, shook him heartily by the

hand, and bade him come along. Tea was in the drawing-room, and he must introduce him to Mrs. Harpur. Mr. Fox declared that he should have much pleasure to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Harpur, and would therefore step into the drawing-room for a few minutes, and should indeed be glad of a cup of tea; but that he must beg Mr. Harpur's attention for a few minutes in privacy. Mr. Harpur called for lights, and led the way to his library, where Mr. Fox had so soon explained his errand that both gentlemen were quickly in Mrs. Harpur's large and splendid drawing-room, chatting with Mrs. Harpur on a variety of things and persons, that to my reader would prove only so many puzzles, without a world of preliminary explanation. We will leave them to spend a comfortable evening together without further remark, than that Michael Shaw received an order from Mr. Fox to take a good horse at daybreak and convey the letter which was given to him to Mr. Henry Flamstead, and return, if possible, with an answer by ten o'clock. The commission was duly executed by Michael, and at ten Mr. Fox took his way again to the office of Harpur and Fife, where he was conducted by the grave porter, at his first glance, and without a word, to the office of Mr. Harpur, and where Mr. Harpur was not only in waiting, but Mr. Screw Pepper also very soon made his appearance.

Mr. Harpur, with a formal politeness, presented Mr. Pepper a chair, observing, "This gentleman, Mr. Pepper, is a friend of Mr. Flamstead, of Dainsby, and is requested by his friend to make some inquiries into the present position of the affairs of the bankruptcy."

Mr. Screw Pepper cast a glance at Mr. Fox, made a grave bow, to which he received one very much its counterpart from Mr. Fox. It was evident that such a thing as a friend of Mr. Flamstead making any inquiry into these affairs, and especially so sub-

stantial looking a friend, and in such a place as the office of Mr. Harpur, was quite a new and unexpected thing to him. "He would be very happy," he observed, "to give the gentleman any information in his power. He could assure him that it had been a very troublesome business." "I should think so," replied Mr. Fox, "for it has now, by all accounts, been five years in hand, and is, as I find it, now in a very awkward case, if it be necessary to pull down the Hall, and to dispose of the estate in parcels. You must indeed have been very unsuccessful in your efforts to sell, if that be necessary." "My dear sir," said Mr. Screw Pepper, "if I were to give you a full history of all the difficulties we have had to contend with, it would be a very long history indeed. The fact is as you see it; we are at our wits' end, and shall be thankful indeed to get enough to cover all expenses, by every contrivance that we can." "On the other hand," said Mr. Fox, "my friend Flamstead makes the most lamentable complaints of ill-usage: that such is the real value of the estate, that there was no just cause to take it out of his hands; that it has been grossly mismanaged; that it has not been fairly dealt by, or the estate would long ago have been sold and a handsome surplus handed over to him."

Mr. Screw Pepper reddened at this statement; but on recollecting where and in what presence he was, he assumed a mild and injured air, and said, "This does not surprise me, sir, I assure you, at all. I and the assignees have had much to bear from the petulance and insinuations of Mr. Flamstead. Perhaps, however, it was only natural that a man who had lost so handsome a property by his own imprudence, and was by no means, as might be supposed, a nice calculator, should feel irritated by seeing everything in the world gone from him. Believe me, no management could satisfy such a man; but this he would say," continued he, "for himself and

the assignees, that happy should they be at any time to receive an offer which would cover the debts."—"And what may the amount of those debts be?" inquired Mr. Fox.—"Thirty thousand pounds."—"Thirty thousand pounds; and did Mr. Screw Pepper mean to say that the estate would not fetch that sum?"—"Yes, that sum it certainly would fetch; but then there were also the legal charges for law proceedings, agency, and measures necessary to effect a sale, which of necessity was altogether a large sum."—"And what sum?" asked Mr. Fox.

Mr. Screw Pepper hesitated—"He did not know that he was at liberty to expose the affairs of the bankruptcy, at least without knowing what was the gentleman's object in these inquiries. At the proper time both Mr. Flamstead and all others whom it concerned would have a proper statement."

"But Mr. Pepper," said Mr. Harpur, "it seems to me only fair to give a candid statement to this gentleman. The bankrupt has certainly in such an estate a great matter of interest as well as his creditors. Now I, as a lawyer, know that large expenses must and will have accumulated, and I say that I, as a lawyer, were I engaged in this business, should have no hesitation to state them. Perhaps they may be as much as ten thousand pounds?"

"They are more, I believe," said Mr. Screw Pepper, but with evident reluctance.

"Well," said Mr. Fox, "say that they could by any possibility be twenty thousand pounds—that would make but fifty thousand—and you do not really mean to say that the estate would not fetch in the market that sum, without the necessity of pulling it, as it were, to pieces?"

"Yes, I mean to say that. I protest to you that we have never yet been able to obtain such an offer."

"And you would be glad to get such a one?"

"Glad! yes, indeed, we should," said Mr. Pepper,

resuming something of his chuckling and self-complacent manner; "but I am afraid that we might wait not for five, but for ten years before we could possibly obtain that. We should jump at it."

"You would?—then let me tell you," said Mr. Fox, "that I am the purchaser."

"You the purchaser, for fifty thousand pounds."

"I!" repeated Mr. Fox, in the same tone as the astonished lawyer, "the purchaser for fifty thousand pounds; that is to say, I will purchase the estate here on the spot, without a single look at it, for that sum, it being always understood that nothing but fair and just debts and expenses shall be paid; and whatever surplus shall remain of that sum, shall be paid over to my friend Flamstead."

"Of course," said Mr. Harpur.

"Of course," said Mr. Screw Pepper, but with a strange sort of chop-fallen melancholy; adding, however, "but let us see—the sale is advertised to come off in a few days—had not the gentleman better take the chance of the biddings? he might get it for something less.—"Mr. Screw Pepper," said Mr. Harpur gravely, "that is now quite out of the question. My friend here wishes to preserve the house and estate entire. He might risk a part of this at a public sale. Besides, you have advertised the *house* in lots; you cannot have the sale except on these conditions. That would not suit my client—in short, the thing is done—you have made your offer, and it has been accepted."—"Oh yes," said Mr. Pepper flurriedly, "so far as I am concerned, oh yes! but still, you see the assignees may not be satisfied to forego the sale. I am taken somewhat by surprise. I—"

"Mr. Pepper," said Mr. Harpur, still more gravely, and with a certain severe sternness, "what am I to think? You declare positively that you have never been able to obtain such an offer; that you never expect such a one if you were to wait five or

ten years. Pray, what do you mean? As a professional man, I hope you will reflect on what you are doing. I am evidence that the estate is bought and sold."

Mr. Pepper seemed to gasp for breath, he was pale as ashes, but saw what was inevitable, and added in a low tone, "Very well; there is one thing, however, necessary, and that is, that I should understand clearly this gentleman's responsibility—of course, Mr. Harpur, seeing him as your client, I do not doubt this; but, as the sale is fixed, it could not be put off without the utmost certainty that this bargain will be completed." Mr. Fox nodded to Mr. Harpur, who then said, "You will have a deposit as guarantee against all such chance. Mr. Pepper, what do you require for that purpose?"—"Five thousand pounds."—"Have the goodness to give him a cheque for *ten* thousand," said Mr. Fox.

Mr. Pepper looked astonished at the stranger. Mr. Harpur sat down, drew forth a cheque-book, and wrote a cheque for the specified sum. As he handed it to Mr. Pepper, he said, "You will see now that it is necessary to draw up the agreement on the spot." He rung the bell, a certain clerk was ordered to be sent for, to whom Mr. Harpur dictated the terms of the agreement for the sale of Dainsby Old Hall and estate. Into the particulars of this we need not enter. It was agreed that the draft of conveyance should be ready by a certain day, and that the estate be conveyed free of all mortgages, debts, or incumbrances whatever, the purchaser guaranteeing to pay the purchase-money into the hands of Messrs. Harpur and Fife, before signing the title-deeds.

Mr. Screw Pepper then took his leave, and no sooner was the door of the office closed upon him, than Mr. Harpur turned to Mr. Fox, and laughing said, "A fox indeed you are, my friend. You have fairly entrapped this wily Screw Pepper, or corkscrew, we might call him. He will hang him-

self for vexation. But I have not done with him yet. I promise you he shall have a proper sifting, and not one shilling shall he get of his bill, which is not justly his due."

When Mr. Fox appeared at the inn again, he was in the brightest spirits. He ordered a famous dinner, and some fine old port in, and Michael and he sat and enjoyed themselves famously. It was not, however, till they were driving homeward that Mr. Fox said, "Well, Michael, I think we have put a scotch into this Mr. Screw Pepper's wheel at last. I've stopped the sale."—Well done! well done!" said Michael, "that was a bit of work worth being in a hurry for. Let's make haste and carry the news." Michael with this gave his horse the whip, and away they went at full speed.—"You've really stopped the sale!" "I've done more than that—I've bought the estate!" "You've bought the estate!—for Mr. Flamstead, I reckon."—"For Mr. Flamstead? Oh, Mick, I wish I could; but where was he to get the money? I am afraid there will be nothing over when all is paid. No, I've done the best thing I could. I bought the Hall and the estate, to prevent them being pulled to pieces. Only think what a grief it would have been to all the family to have the old house pulled down stick and stone."—"To be sure," said Michael, with a cold sort of voice—"but someway I always counted on the old place coming to Mr. Flamstead again—I am afraid it will hurt him when he hears of it."

"What!" said Mr. Fox, "when he hears that I've bought it, and that he can come there as often as he likes? Michael, you don't congratulate me then?"

"Why, yes, I congratulate you—dang my buttons! I don't know rightly what I should think." And Michael fell into a deep silence again, which was uninterrupted for the rest of the way. Mr. Fox alighted at his cottage, saying to Michael—"I am in your debt, Michael—we will settle when I see

you next," and Michael, with a strange look, gave his horse a cut and drove away.

The next day Mr. Fox met Tom Fletcher, and was about to put out his hand to give him a shake, but Tom kept his hands in his pockets, gave a sort of nod, said "A fine day, Mester," and strode on.

"That fellow, Mick, is affronted that I have bought the Flamstead estate for myself," said Mr. Fox, "and has communicated his ill-humour to this surly old carrier, now!"

Mr. Fox did not enter Tom's cottage that day, but steered his way to the Flamsteads. He had, in the letter which Mick had fetched from Mr. Flamstead, received his full permission to do whatever he thought right on his behalf, and "could I," said he to himself, "do better than save the estate from utter ruin? They will certainly be well pleased with what I have done."

It was a pleasant autumn evening as he drew near Mr. Flamstead's cottage; the sun shone glowingly on his garden. The goldfinch hung in the porch over the door, and was picking his groundsel seeds from between the wires of his cage, and chirping melodiously as if overflowing with happiness. All looked full of peaceful domestic joy. Mr. Fox opened the door—the family sat together at tea.

"Just in time!" said John Fox, who went up and shook Mr. and Mrs. Flamstead by the hand heartily, gave Miss Nancy a pleasant nod, bade her be going on and he would take a chair for himself. Nancy handed him a cup of tea.

"Well," said he, as he placed it before him, "we've caught this Mr. Pepper at last, I think. Do you know, I have bought the estate."

"I hear so," said Mr. Flamstead coolly; Mrs. Flamstead sighed; and there was a strange silence.

"What the dickens!" thought John Fox, "they're discontented too! Now what *would* people have? Did they expect that I should buy the property and

make them a present of it? Zounds! I must see if I can't drive a little sense into them!"

He then went on to tell in what condition he found the property, and related all the particulars of the interview with Screw Pepper, adding, however, that he hoped out of the fifty thousand pounds, that when all just demands were paid, a handsome surplus would remain for Mr. Flamstead.

"You are very good, Mr. Fox," said Mr. Flamstead, and again there was silence.

"Well," said Mr. Fox, "I did hope that I should have pleased you. I confess, too, that I all my life have had a liking for this old place, and should be proud to be the possessor of it; but as you do not seem pleased, I can only say that if you can find a friend, before the title-deeds are signed, who will advance you the money, I will give up the bargain to you."

"You are very good," again said Mr. Flamstead, "but you know very well that I have no such friend —I have but one—and if he be living he is not here; you may, therefore, safely say what you do—and yet, let me say, you may well call it a bargain. Fifty thousand pounds! yes, indeed it is a bargain!"

"Well," rejoined Mr. Fox, "I can sincerely enter into your feelings, Mr. Flamstead. I know how you must feel, and I will tell you at once, that so far from wishing to make any bargain at your expense, we will have, if you please, the whole estate valued by fair and honest men, and I will pay its full value. You shall have that, and all that I can wring out of this miserable lawyer—I don't wish to be hard—nay, I must confess that I want to serve you both out of regard for you and your family; and I have pleased myself with this idea, that George might come and manage the estate for me."

These statements seemed to excite a good deal of surprise, and to soften down wonderfully the minds of the family. They said it was really kind, really

very generous, there was a great cordiality. Nancy put away the cup of tea, that Mr. Fox had allowed to stand till it was cold, and poured him out some fresh, holding out to him the plate of bread-and-butter, and pressing him to make a good tea after his walk. But somehow, there was a weight, a sadness, a constraint still in the house, and Mr. John Fox took an early and dissatisfied leave.

In the course of the following week the old gentleman walked down to Dainsby. He strolled past the hall gates, contemplating, no doubt, the time when he should be in possession of it, and then made a visit to the Widow Westbrook. The buxom widow was in her yard feeding a brood of pheasants that had been reared under a hen, the old bird having been killed by a labourer accidentally, as she sat on her nest. Mr. Fox was not without apprehensions that the coldness which had so manifested itself in Michael and Tom, and the Flamsteads, would also meet him here. But to his agreeable surprise Mrs. Westbrook was as smiling and as cordial as ever. After some conversation on the pheasants, she said good-humouredly, "Well, Mr. Fox, I hear that you have bought the Dainsby estate!" "Yes, I have." "Oh, I am so pleased, you don't know. To think that we shall have that dear, good family, after all they have suffered, in the old place again." "What?" said Mr. Fox, "how? *I've* bought it, do you understand, Mrs. Westbrook, and not *they*." "Oh, yes, I understand—*you've* bought it, but for *them*, of course!" "How of course, Mrs. Westbrook? how of course? I should be glad to know." "Why, you *have* bought it for them and not for yourself, Mr. Fox:" said Mrs. Westbrook, gravely and with evident surprise, "I never dreamed of anything else." "And pray, Mrs. Westbrook," said Mr. Fox, "as you are a clever woman of business, can you tell me where the Flamsteads are to get the money from to pay for it?" "The money to pay

for it? Why, from you, to be sure, Mr. Fox, what else? That's what I always made myself sure of when I heard you had bought it. 'He is fond of the family,' I said, 'and has determined to buy it for them to get them out of that wretch's hands, and then he will let his money lie on mortgage, and all will be as it should be.'" "As it should be, Mrs. Westbrook? If I am to credit the assignees, there will be little or no surplus when the debts are paid, and then what is there to pay the interest of so large a sum as fifty thousand pounds?' "Oh, the rental will pay that sure enough, and in a few years all that money of the clockmaker's will drop in and clear off every thing."

Mr. Fox shook his head; "I am afraid, Mrs. Westbrook," said he, "that at my time of life it would not be reckoned a very sane thing to depend on the money of the Clockmaker. 'A bird in the hand,' is the maxim, you know, of old."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Westbrook, casting an indignant and contemptuous glance at Mr. Fox, "I see how it is. After all, you are no better than the rest. You go about pretending such a friendship for the old Clockmaker, and for the family, and it's only to worm yourself into all the secrets of the affairs, and then you pop in and buy the place for yourself. Now, I'll tell you just what I think of you, and that is, you are a hypocritical, sneaking, designing old fellow! What family have you, pray, that you should need such a hall and estate for as this? Surely you could, at least, have bought the place conditionally for the Flamsteads, and let them have it when their uncle's money does come in. Out upon you, Mr. Fox! out upon you!"

Mrs. Westbrook rose in her indignation, as it were, six inches higher in her shoes. She was as warm and as rosy as one of her own pæonies; and poor Mr. Fox seemed to shrink up dwarfed and confounded before her.

She flung the last food out of the basin to the pheasants, and was turning disdainfully away, when Mr. Fox said, "You are very hard upon me, Mrs. Westbrook, very hard. You do not consider that I have nephews and nieces of my own that look to me for provision, and I cannot really buy large estates to give away to friends."—"Oh, you have relations, have you? I see how it is. There's worse than no chance for the Flamsteads at all, then. Oh, you cunning old Fox, why did you not mention these relations before? I've done with you! Get out of my yard—I've done with you!"

Mrs. Westbrook turned into her house like a storm-wind. Poor Mr. Fox stood a moment looking after her, and then retraced his way up the village, apparently in no very agreeable frame of mind.

But rich men have wonderful powers of reconciliation. It was not long before Tom Fletcher and Michael Shaw were quite won over by Mr. Fox. They took up his cause; they were as friendly as ever with him; nay, they argued with Mrs. Westbrook in his favour.

"What would people have?" they said. "What can the man do? He has saved the estate from being torn to pieces—has he not? He has done more than any one else has done. And who expects, now-a-days, that people are going to give estates away. Has he not fairly bought it, and offered to let the Flamsteads have it, if they can pay for it, and more than that, to get all he can out of the assignees for them—and to give even more for the property, if it be worth it? What more can you want?"

"That man can persuade those two fools to anything," said Mrs. Westbrook, angrily. "They shall never come about my place!" There was quite a feud. The Flamsteads and Mrs. Westbrook held more warmly, more closely than ever together—whilst the zealous widow looked as coldly on Mr.

Fox, Tom, and Michael, as the cold and distant Alps on the far-off plains of Italy.

Time rolled on, and at length, in October, Mr. Fox informed Tom and Michael that all was settled; the writings were signed, and he was empowered to enter at once on possession. These two worthies, who now entered with all the zeal of partisans into the cause of Mr. Fox, begged to have the pleasure of going to turn out old Gideon Spine and his family; and having obtained this permission, away they went in Michael's taxed-cart. They whirled up to the great gate, which they found locked; and gave a famous pull at the bell, which rang out loud and hollow as bells do sound in great, deserted places.

"What grass there is growing i'th' court," said Tom Fletcher, as he peeped through the bars of the gate; "and what bushes there hangen from th' very pillars o' th' gates, and what a nation heap o' jack-a-daws about th' place! But here comes th' oud woman!"

This was Mrs. Gideon Spine, who was coming to open the gate. Having told her that they wanted to speak with Gideon, they followed her up the court, rejoicing themselves in the thought of speedily packing Gideon and all his brood out of the house. When they had, however, advanced a little way, they saw in a sunny corner two or three children seated on the ground, and making circles of stones, which they were imagining to be houses and fire-places, as children do. The sight, simple as it was, someway considerably abated their ardour. "Poor things," said Mick to himself, "they are not in fault, and yet they must pack—it's hard though!"

But while this was passing in Michael's mind, there appeared old Gideon at the hall-door, who, holding it half-open, called loudly for his wife to come to him quickly. At his call the wife sprang

hastily up the steps, he pulled her in, and Tom and Michael, who followed hastily after, found the door banged in their faces, and heard the key turned in the lock, and all the heavy bolts drawn. They shook the door, knocked, shouted, but all in vain. Presently Gideon looked out of a window above, and told them that he was aware of their object, but that he held the house for the assignees, and should not surrender it without a written order from Mr. Pepper.

Our heroes were fairly baffled. They might place the house in a sort of siege with very little prospect of carrying it by storm; they therefore hastily again mounted the taxed-cart, and drove off to inform Mr. Fox. That gentleman was very indignant at the news, and declared that the very next morning he would break down the door and pitch Gideon down the steps. He set out, attended by Mick and Tom, for this adventurous purpose: but, to their common surprise, on arriving there, they found the doors open, and the whole Spine family fled.

There was now a speedy influx of bricklayers and carpenters into the Hall. Men were set to work to lop away wild boughs and break up and re-gravel walks, and women to weed and dig away with knives the grass from the crevices of the court-pavement. All was life and bustle where desolation and silence had reigned so long. It was amazing what a change a few weeks effected. But this change, this bustle, this employment of so many people, seemed to cast deeper sadness on the Flamsteads, and to make Mrs. Westbrook only the more disinclined for accommodation with Mr. Fox or Michael. There was a regular schism. True, however, in about six weeks there was some little abatement in the violence of her feelings, from the fact of Mr. Flamstead receiving a letter from Mr. Fox, stating that Mr. Harpur having had Mr. Screw Pepper's bill taxed, ten thousand pounds had been

struck off at once, which Mr. Fox had paid into Smith's bank for Mr. Flamstead. Mr. Flamstead was much affected by this; he called on Mr. Fox, and gave him his warmest thanks. He begged that he would overlook any feeling which himself or his family had shown, but that he trusted Mr. Fox would understand the excited and irritable state of their minds. The old gentleman not only received Mr. Flamstead very cordially, but pressed him to come often to visit him.

Time rolled on, and it was wonderful to see how rapidly things rolled on with it. All within and without the Hall assumed a most prosperous air. On the other hand, the Flamsteads had given up the post on the canal, and had taken a pretty house about a mile from Dainsby. In Derby, since Mr. Harpur had got hold of the business, such discoveries were made of the dishonest transactions of Mr. Screw Pepper, that not only had the said amazing sum of ten thousand pounds been struck off his bill, but Mr. Harpur declared he never would cease till he was struck off the roll of attorneys. So vigorously did he prosecute this object that one day it was rumoured that Mr. Pepper had not only taken himself off to America, but had carried off with him the money of Ned Stocks and Peter Snape, which had been left in his hands for him to invest again for them. This was news that seemed to rejoice every body that heard it, for these greedy and remorseless men were the original cause of all the Flamsteads' troubles. At the winding up of the accounts of the Dainsby estate, five thousand pounds more out of the fifty thousand paid by Mr. John Fox were handed over to Mr. Flamstead.

So far had these circumstances, and the very friendly disposition of Mr. Fox towards the Flamstead family softened every painful feeling occasioned by his purchase of the estate, that though none of them had ventured near the Hall since he had

removed to it, yet as Christmas was approaching, Mr. Fox ventured on the bold experiment of inviting the whole family to come and eat their Christmas dinner with him. He knew, he said, that it would be a hard struggle for them, but to make it easier he would invite them all alone, and he hinted that, as he expressed it, the ice once broken, they would not find it again difficult.

It was a hard combat between sensibility and a sense of duty. Fifteen thousand pounds Mr. Fox had been the means of saving to them; he had rid them and the country of their worst enemy; he had saved the estate and the beloved old house from dismemberment and ruin; and who could tell whether or not one day, when the Clockmaker's fortune fell in, they might not have a chance of purchasing it once more. Besides this, the old gentleman still declared that he would have the estate valued, and that they should have the benefit of it; and still offered George a handsome income to live with him, and to become his steward.

These considerations were not to be overlooked. They put a stern restraint on their feelings, and resolved, cost what it would, to accept the invitation.

The day came. As the dinner hour approached, the Flamsteads in their simple barouche drove up the village, and up to the Hall gates. The villagers gazed all from their windows as they went in that direction; and when they actually saw them take the turn to the Hall, they were lost in astonishment. Why they are actually going to the Hall! They are actually gone there! How can they bear to see that old place in the hands of a stranger?

Yes, we may repeat the question, and say, How could they? It was a severe trial. As the servants in rich liveries came out on the steps to receive them, I believe that there was not one of the party who did not tremble every limb. They entered the well known hall. How exactly was every thing as

it had been! but how bright and beautiful! There was the curious cuckoo-clock which had been made by Nicholas Flamstead, but without his name, which at that moment struck five, with the same soft ringing tones, and the cuckoo shouting from within.

Mr. Fox came from the library to meet them. He welcomed them most heartily, but yet with a respectful tenderness, which showed that he understood their feelings. He led them into the ample drawing-room that they knew so well; the very children were silent with the effect of memory, and the sense of the present. Mr. Fox led Mrs. Flamstead to the sofa, and placed her in the very spot she used so commonly to occupy; she could no longer contain herself, and her tears, spite of herself, burst forth. The kind host did not seem to notice it, but bustled about, and made every one be seated, and then began talking of the villain Pepper —a subject which he hoped would arouse them, and turn them a little from the present scene. He told them of the sharp pursuit which had been made after him, and the narrow escape he had had of being taken on board the vessel, when under sail from Liverpool. He then entered into other details of his notorious exploits. Dinner was announced, and he led in Mrs. Flamstead.

There was an awkwardness here that even Mr. Fox seemed to feel vividly. At the head of that table had Mrs. Flamstead so many years presided. But he said, "Here, my dear Mrs. Flamstead, you are very delicate, you must take your seat by me. Miss Nancy will oblige me by taking the head of the table." They sat down in silence. It was a heavy affair. Old feelings and memories came crowding upon them on so many sides, that the dinner seemed rather to choke them than do them any good. It was a thorough martyrdom. The host exerted himself wonderfully to talk and to infuse some liveliness into the group, but it did not succeed.

When the dessert was set on the table and the servants withdrawn, the host himself seemed to breathe more freely. He put round the decanters, helped to fruit, and said, "Come, now, pray do let us be a little gayer. There is nothing which I so much wish as to accustom you to come here often, and to come with pleasure. George, my good fellow, do cut some of those oranges for us. Nancy, my dear, distribute some of those almonds and raisins amongst the youngsters. Bob there! You are fond of nuts, I know; why don't you crack some? and give Jane some, who sits beside you as meek as if she belonged to nobody. Come, let's be merry."

There were some melancholy smiles, and a vain attempt to comply, but it *was* a vain one. How *could* they be merry there?

"This will never do!" exclaimed the old gentleman, striking his hand upon the table. "We must try another song. Listen, my friends, I have some news for you. The Clockmaker—I have heard of him to-day—he is alive!"

It was as if he had given an electric shock to the whole family—they started up from their seats—"Alive! You have heard of him? Where? How?"

Mr. Flamstead looked as if he saw a ghost. His face was ashy pale; his eyes seemed starting from his head with intense anxiety, his left hand was thrust into his hair, while his right rested on the table to support him. "Alive! Is my uncle then in England? Thank God, that I may yet see him again in life!"

"Henry," said the host solemnly, "should you know the Clockmaker if you saw him? May not forty years have altered him past your recognition?"

"No, no! I cannot believe it—I see him clearly as on the last day we parted—my uncle's form is impressed upon my memory by so much kindness—I should know him the moment I saw him!"

The old man smiled, and then shaking his head, said, "Henry, you are mistaken; you see him as he was, not as he is. Time is a cunning disguiser. You *have* seen your uncle, and did not know him. He has been with you; has talked with you, but you knew him not. *I am Nicholas Flamstead, the Clockmaker!*"

There was a moment's silence of startled astonishment, and then an exclamation, "You! you our uncle! You, indeed, our beloved, long-lost uncle!"

"I see it!" then cried Henry Flamstead, frantically striking his hand on his forehead, "how could I be so blind! How often have I felt that I knew that voice—that that eye had a familiar expression!" He sprang forward: there was a scene of embracing and weeping, and recognition, that made the very servants in the hall wonder what was the matter.

When the confusion and the excitement had somewhat abated, "Yes," said the old man, radiant with smiles and emotion, "I am the Clockmaker—in this house I was born, and lived here a boy and a youth; from this house I went forth and commenced life for myself; a mother's blessed memory hallows this house: no wonder that it was dear to me. You are the only relations I have in this world. This house and all it contains are yours!" His voice was here choked with emotion, and tears and sobs of affectionate gladness were heard all round him.

"What," said he, again recovering himself, "what so delightful could I picture to myself, as to spend the evening of my days amongst those who are nearest and dearest to me? I came back with a trembling heart. The circumstances of an eventful youth had made me keep aloof so long from my native land, that I hardly knew how I should find things here. News that came to me from my friend Harpur hastened my steps. I was but just in time to save this place, and to punish a scoundrel on whose course my eye had long been fixed. Thank God that I was in time, and that now all is safe. Here is

your own home; but here also is mine. I have taken the liberty to select two rooms for my own. The bedroom I used to occupy when a boy here, and the little library which overlooks my favourite view of the village. But that reminds me—we must send the news to Mrs. Westbrook; I am not quite easy till she and I are friends; she is a woman in ten thousand; I would not be a day longer out of her favour for the worth of her farm."

At this upsprung the whole troop of children, all eager to run off. "Nay! nay! stop! stop!" cried the Clockmaker. "George and Nancy, you shall stay here. What, it is so late is it, for the children? —well, it is a fine moonlight night, and not a quarter of a mile's run for them; let them go—you shall meet them and Mrs. Westbrook at the gate, for I'll lay any money she will come back with them."

Away went the young ones, and such of the villagers as were out wondered what was the matter. Presently the whole troop burst into Mrs. Westbrook's house. "Our uncle the Clockmaker is come! our uncle the Clockmaker is come! It's Mr. Fox! he's at the Hall—we're all there, and it's to be our home again!"

They seized on the bewildered widow, and began dragging her along with them, never noticing Michael Shaw, who, dressed in his very best, had been eating a little supper with the widow. "You must come! come instantly. He has sent for you. Papa and mamma want you—they all want you!"

By the help of Michael Shaw the Widow Westbrook soon understood the cause of all this jubilation, and presently the out-of-door villagers saw her very hastily moving along, surrounded by the Flamstead children, some of whom were skipping before her, some holding by her cloak.

The handsome widow seemed to be laughing and crying at the same time. At length some villager said to her, "What's amiss, Mrs. Westbrook. Pray what's all this about?"

"Good news!" cried the widow, pointing to the Hall, and hastening on; she could say no more, but the children cried, "Oh, yes! good news—our uncle the Clockmaker is come again!"

The news flew from house to house; and, late though it was, it reached the ears of the ringers. At once they ran off to the steeple; and before Mrs. Westbrook had reached the Hall, the bells were ringing away merrily for the return of the Clockmaker.

We need not say how George and Nancy Flamstead met the widow at the gate, or how they led her in in triumph, or how she was received by the Clockmaker and Mr. and Mrs. Flamstead.

A glorious evening was that at the Hall; and before it was over, Michael Shaw and Tom Fletcher walked in. The rogues! they had been a long time in the secret. The pretended John Fox was obliged to let them into it. O how Widow Westbrook scolded them for shabby fellows for not letting her into the secret! and yet there are those who say, that in her joy she must soon have forgiven Michael, for in the very next March their banns were published in Dainsby Church, and there was a merry wedding in April, and as merry a piece of work in transporting the windmill, and erecting it on the hill above the widow's house, on a piece of land given to him by Nicholas Flamstead as a keepsake. George was seen on this occasion with his axe and his hammer, and never was a merrier evening spent than at the house of Widow Westb no, we are wrong—at that of Michael and Phœbe Shaw, where the Flamsteads, the Harpurs, and honest Tom Fletcher were assembled to celebrate the raising of the mill; and when the final toast given by Henry Flamstead, was—"*The happy return of my Uncle the Clockmaker!*"

THE END.

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